



SKETCHES

by
H. D. GALERAN

Sketches

by
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Canon Henri-Dieudonne Galeran

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PRESENTATION

Chanoine Galeran rendered us an invaluable service when he gave us these *Sketches*. They capture slices of life, on-the-spot reactions, personality traits, motivations, interpersonal relationships as they develop... a host of elements and dimensions which do not easily find their place in biographies or in other more formal and objective historical works. In a sense, they constitute what the French would call the *petite histoire* of Father d'Alzon.

Yet they provide unique and precious insights on the founder of the Assumptionists, his times, the people he lived and dealt with, the diverse situations that confronted him. Here, Father d'Alzon is seen from within, lovingly, admiringly and sometimes mischievously. This may not be the stuff with which history is made. It is perhaps the stuff of which life is made.

Until now, these sketches were available in French only, which means that they were inaccessible even to some Assumptionists. By translating them into English, Father Richard Richards has allowed Chanoine Galeran to render his invaluable service to English-speaking Assumptionists and to others who might be interested. Henceforth, they too can profit by this look from within. This translation becomes another ray of light and warmth cast on the person and the life of Fr. d'Alzon.

So once more we are indebted to Father Richard Richards who also gave us *D'Alzon, Fighter for God* (1974), *The Assumptionists* (1980) and who so painstakingly collaborated just recently in publishing the biography of Bishop Pius Neveu, A.A., *The Peasant from Makeyevka*. We want Father Richards to know that we are deeply grateful. Our gratitude is not completely disinterested. We would like to see more publications like this...

Joseph G. Loiselle, A.A.
Provincial

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

These *Sketches of Fr. d'Alzon* first appeared in *Souvenirs*, a publication for Assumptionists which began in 1881. The first *sketch* appeared on December 9, 1893; the last, on October 14, 1899. There were interruptions in 1894 and 1896, and for this reason alone the *Sketches* fall into three series. The individual *sketches* follow no logical or chronological order. They are simply anecdotes and essays on various facets of Fr. Emmanuel d'Alzon's life and work and the spirit animating them.

The author is Canon Henri-Dieudonné Galeran, one of the first pupils of Assumption College in Nîmes, where he was a schoolmate of the future Cardinal Anatole de Cabrières and of Fr. François Picard, the second Superior General of the Assumptionists. It seems that Fr. d'Alzon would have wanted Galeran to become an Assumptionist, but his character was unsuited for community life. He became a secular priest in the diocese of Montpellier. He was chaplain of the Providence Convent in Montpellier and then pastor in Ceyras. He got into trouble with his bishop. In those days, the French government forbade clerics from traveling to Rome without a special authorization. Galeran went anyhow, and was suspended from priestly functions by his bishop. Galeran appealed to Rome against his bishop. He won his suit, but Rome suggested that, in the interest of peace and harmony, he leave the diocese. These events happened between 1860 and 1862.

Galeran then became a "missionary" in England. Because he was intelligent, zealous, and a fine preacher, he was highly successful. He remained in England thirty years and during many years corresponded with Fr. d'Alzon, until Father's death in 1880. In August, 1892, he showed up in Paris and asked Fr. Picard if he could spend his vacation in the Assumptionist community in Jerusalem. He arrived at Notre-Dame de France in late August, 1892, and his "vacation" lasted for years.

He was asked to write about Fr. d'Alzon and the early Assumptionists. He had to be coaxed, but finally in December, 1893, his first sketch appeared. The last *sketch* was published on October 14, 1899. Canon Galeran's memory had not failed him and he had not run out of material. But abruptly and unexpectedly he stopped writing and never

gave a written explanation. We now know that the real cause was that the *Souvenirs*, in which the *Sketches* had appeared, ceased publication as a result of the suppression of the Congregations in France. Given the circumstances, the less written about the Congregation, the better it was.

Another reason why Galeran wrote no more was World War I, which wreaked hardships upon the Assumptionists in Jerusalem and upon Canon Galeran. The Turks expelled the entire community in December, 1914. Galeran, then 82 years old, painfully made his way to Damascus. There he was nursed by the Daughters of Charity in their hospital. All Galeran's notes and documentation that he had in Jerusalem were destroyed. Disheartened and unable to bear the hardships, Galeran died on January 7, 1915.

All the *Sketches* were collected and published in book form in 1924. I have used that volume as the basis for the present translation/edition. A few sketches were deleted because they contained only untranslatable puns. Some were dropped because they really dealt more with Galeran than with Fr. d'Alzon. Occasionally, passages or sections were omitted because they were repetitious or because I deemed them of little or no interest to present-day readers. However, most of Galeran's *Sketches* are found here. Some present a personal insight into the spiritual aspect of Fr. d'Alzon's life. Others present a more informal, intimate, or even more humorous view of the founder of the Assumptionists than is usually available in English.

R.R. a.a.

PREFACE

...to my notes and souvenirs about Fr. d'Alzon

I am not an Assumptionist, but I am their brother because their founder, whom I always loved and revered as a father, was my teacher. I am one of Father d'Alzon's first pupils. I was honored that he loved me like a son; and for this reason I have felt it my duty carefully to gather my recollections, write them down, and transmit them to our beloved Assumptionists. I feel that I owe to the memory of my Father this loving testimony of a son who recalls for the younger members of the family what he saw, what he heard of a leader whose impressiveness deserves to be brought to light. Who can do this better than us old-timers who, so often, felt his noble heart beat alongside our own?

I shall not attempt to be eloquent, nor to invest his thought with an elaborate form, nor to excite admiration by theatrics. No, let's be simple, with pure affection. Let us consider our Father's features in their natural expression, attractive and distinguished. Let not even the smallest detail escape us.

From the very outset, I would like to refute an objection concerning the Assumptionists, which has more than once been formulated by serious men such as bishops, superiors of religious Orders, and eminent laymen. I am speaking now of what has been said to me, and of what I have answered.

This is the objection, always the same, but formulated differently by various people: The Assumptionists are not what their founder intended them to be. As they are now, we must undoubtedly admire their zeal; but they re-shaped themselves according to a plan which was never that of Fr. d'Alzon.

First, let me give a personal impression. Between 1846 and 1850, I knew Fr. d'Alzon's intimate thoughts concerning the aim of the congregation he wanted to found; later from 1857 to 1862, I followed the development of the family whose birth I had witnessed. After, storm-tossed on distant shores, I saw absolutely nothing of the Assumptionists, although Fr. d'Alzon often wrote to me in my exile, or better, in my

“new homeland.”

Finally, after an absence of some thirty years, having become a new man in habits, language, and social position, I was able to rest for a while and I returned to France, Paris and Nîmes. I saw the Assumptionists at work and naturally I noticed much. I was amazed at the rapid progress of a congregation whose modest beginnings I had seen. Yet I easily knew where I was; I felt at home everywhere and with everyone. It was as if I saw a strong and vigorous adult where I had previously known only a tiny infant. After my initial surprise, I found in this grown-up brother the traits and attitude of my Father. I heard the virile and energetic voice which I had known so well.

I was received, embraced, like an elder brother returning from distant lands. I embraced my contemporaries and my juniors as one does when re-discovering one's own. Viewing the Congregation and its apostolate, I saw the realization of a plan whose general outline I knew full well. I marveled, but really I expected no less because I knew what the Father had wanted. All this is personal, no doubt, but it does carry some weight.

Father d'Alzon had in mind everything that in fact his religious family has become. The Divine Master did not during his lifetime see his Church grow and develop. In his days, the Cenacle gave no hint of the future St. Peter's in Rome. The Apostles' Creed never indicated that some day numerous Councils would meet to explicate its articles. When they saw Simon Peter in the streets of Jerusalem, Antioch, or Rome, the first Christians never dreamed of a golden papal tiara, nor of a college of Cardinals, nor of mitred bishops. Who would dare say today that the Church is not what the Divine Founder wanted, that it is not according to his plans? Did not the creator of the sun also make its resplendent rays, even though they develop only bit by bit from early dawn to high noon? A religious congregation is like the Church, only on a smaller scale.

Father d'Alzon had sown the seed. He knew why he sowed, although his eyes were never to see the prodigious growth of the mustard seed. Before his death, he already saw the fine tree take root. At his death, the Congregation was already formed according to his spirit, already organized, and advancing in its apostolate. He left to his sons instructions that very clearly indicate the objective which they must

pursue, the means they must take, the value of the vows which must unite them, and the supernatural knowledge that must inform their religious life. The precious lines which he entitled *Novissima Verba* summarize his thought. They resemble the final counsels which the patriarchs and the holy kings, just prior to their death, gave to their sons and their successors.

What are the characteristic traits of the Assumptionists? We have here a new religious family whose aims correspond to new needs. It is a mixed congregation which blends contemplation and the choral office with a very active life. This activity manifests itself in three ways:

- 1) Truth, acquired by serious study, according to the instructions of the Holy See;
- 2) Truth communicated by teaching (both orally and in writing), by preaching and spiritual direction;
- 3) Practical Truth, directly influencing the masses of people in order to direct them toward the supernatural life.

Error itself never changes although its forms may change. One needs to discover its multiple disguises in order to combat it successfully. The apostles, issuing from the Cenacle, observed the world around them and discovered three harmful forces: the philosophical idea, centered then in Antioch; the Jewish idea, in Jerusalem; and the pagan idea, in Rome. That meant that the apostles had to come to grips with rationalism, faulty interpretation, and sensualism. Today, society suffers from naturalism in the sciences, the arts, and literature; from all kinds of lies in the press; from sensuality in the lives of people.

Basically, the problem is always the same but its manifestations may differ. Means of attack and defense must vary according to the twists that evil may take. The Assumptionists oppose to the enemies of the Church and society: sound knowledge based on faith; the press and the impressive religious manifestations which are the pilgrimages, and which re-awaken enthusiasm, reconciling and uniting all social classes in public acts of faith, hope, and charity.

Does not the direct struggle against the philosophical idea, the Jewish idea, the pagan idea consist precisely in this? Let us also be clear on an important point: it would not be exact to define the Assumptionists

simply as a congregation of journalists or pilgrimage directors. This would confuse that which is secondary and accessory with that which is primary and basic. Even without the press and pilgrimages the Assumptionists would not cease to be themselves. Their objective is to spread truth, supernatural life, and utter devotion to the Holy See. The means employed can be modified or changed according to the circumstances.

God has blessed the apostolate of the press and of pilgrimages, of which the world has taken note. Still, the pilgrimages to Lourdes, Rome, Jerusalem — which have made quite a splash — represent only a tiny portion of the time of these religious. Very few Assumptionists are involved in these activities, when compared to the other religious in ministries such as preaching, teaching, staffing alumnates, and missions in the West and in the Near East.

The National Pilgrimage to Lourdes requires less than a month's work; the Jerusalem one takes up only about two months annually. The *Bonne Presse* apostolate is run by a few religious from the General House, but most of the religious in the community minister in other fields and have nothing to do with journalism. Anyone entering the Assumptionists with the idea of becoming exclusively a journalist or a pilgrimage director is doomed to disappointment.

Let's return to our main idea: we don't think that any commanding general ever drew up a campaign plan with more energy, precision and clarity than did Fr. d'Alzon in a note left for his successor. Here it is:

I remember Assumption's motto: Thy Kingdom Come.

- 1) Labor to restore Christian higher education according to the principles of St. Augustine and St. Thomas;
- 2) Fight the enemies of the Church enrolled in secret societies under the revolutionary banner;
- 3) Struggle for Church unity by devoting myself to the extinction of schism.

For me, henceforth this is everything.

Fr. Picard received this precious legacy, considered its significance, and accepted it. Consequently, the Assumptionists, in their studies, include all branches of learning. They organized journalism to spread

knowledge of Christianity. They gather pilgrims to Rome, Jerusalem, and Lourdes in order to unite them and rally them around the See of Peter, the sole center of unity.

We must therefore admit that the Assumptionists are exactly what their wise founder wanted them to be. Following in his footsteps, they show a breadth of spirit, a generosity of heart, and a zeal that sacrifices the individual for the welfare of others. This is basic in the Congregation of the sons of Fr. d'Alzon.

Their motto is "Thy Kingdom Come." They desire to devote all their energy and all their strength to spreading the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

By education and preaching, they combat the anti-Christian philosophic idea. By the press, they unmask the dark plot of the Jewish idea, i.e. the spirit of lies which misleads people. By pilgrimages, they deal a crushing blow to the pagan idea of sensuality and selfishness, by inviting vast crowds to follow the Cross, along the way of mortification, sacrifice, and self-denial. Thy Kingdom Come!

H.-D. Galeran

FIRST SERIES

HENRI AND ANATOLE: LIKE AND UNLIKE

In 1849, at Assumption College during the vacations, coming from his rooms, Fr. d'Alzon noticed a student named Henri Galeran in the school quadrangle. He was wearing the college uniform of Prussian blue trousers and tunic, with gold buttons and gold-braided cap. Father said to him:

“Come with me.”

“Where are we going?”

“You're very curious! I want you to serve my Mass, and I'm not going to tell you where we are going.”

Along the way, Fr. d'Alzon noticed another student, Anatole de Cabrières, browsing at a book-stall. He too was in uniform. Father called him, “Anatole, come along with us.” Anatole came without uttering a single word.

“You see,” said Father, “the difference between Henri and Anatole. One wanted to know where we were going before he moved. The other followed unquestioningly.”

I learned my lesson, but did I profit by it?

We soon arrived at the Convent of the Refuge, for delinquent girls. The portress was somewhat upset when she saw Fr. d'Alzon enter the convent with two young men in “officers'” uniforms. Things became far worse when it was learned that they were to serve Mass. The community couldn't believe it, but it was a fact. Father preached a very practical sermon, and both students carefully noted what he said. Who knows? They may themselves have used these notes for later sermons.

After the ceremony, we entered the parlor for a cup of coffee. The Superior and her assistant soon arrived. She seemed somewhat serious and absorbed, but greeted Father and the two students graciously. Then she became silent.

“Ah, Mother,” said Fr. d'Alzon, “I see that you are somewhat upset and I think I know why. You were surprised to see me arrive with these two young men, and even more surprised to see them in chapel. I can

assure you that I thought it over very carefully beforehand. I examined them thoroughly, and found that they were ugly enough to enter here without causing any problems.”

We all laughed heartily. I thought of it often. I still think of it.

PEONY AND DAHLIA

One day, in the Campagne woods, Father had with him the same two students. As we walked along, we came upon a magnificent peony plant with fine red flowers in full bloom.

“What a beautiful dahlia,” said someone.

“That’s not a dahlia; it’s a peony,” said Father.

“What’s the difference between the two?”

“The same difference as between de Cabrières and Galeran.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s very simple and I’ll tell you about it. The dahlia is a very carefully cultivated flower. It has a fine stalk and striking colors; its petals have a wonderful symmetry. The peony on the other hand has a somewhat wild appearance. Its exuberant, vigorous flowers cause the stalk to droop. Its petals fall off and are strewn all over the ground. It always seems to lack something, but it is still really a flower. De Cabrières is the dahlia, and Galeran is the peony!”

The living alumni can testify that Fr. d’Alzon seemed clairvoyant. The dahlia is now a bishop, and the peony is still only a peony.

SERMON APPRECIATION

A talented young curate, coming from the pulpit after having preached a sermon on the Passion, was ill-advised enough to ask Father what he thought of the sermon.

“My young friend,” said Fr. d’Alzon, “your sermon contained more than one passion. There was your own passion, because you seemed very preoccupied; then there was the passion of the audience, because you were excessively long. Finally, as you can see, it adds up to compassion!”

The curate vowed ... but a bit too late.

A former pupil, curate of the cathedral, was one day bragging about

how many retreats, sermons, and homilies he had preached.

“Fine,” said Fr. d’Alzon, “but could you tell me what topics you treated?” The curate named quite a few and then Fr. d’Alzon said, “I’m sorry that you neglected to preach a sermon about intemperance of the tongue.”

UPSIDE DOWN

A venerable old pastor, very Gallican, was arguing one day with Fr. d’Alzon. Having exhausted all his arguments and reasons he cried out, “Look, if the Pope commanded me to stand on my head, do you think I’d be obliged to obey?” Smiling, Father looked him over for a moment and said, “Dear Father, even if the Pope ordered you to stand on your head, I don’t think you’d be able to. You’re too fat. But you’d do well to try. Obedience is necessary, not success.”

“THIS PRIEST IS MY SON.”

A young priest, a former pupil, was involved in a court case in Rome.¹ Fr. d’Alzon defended him so strongly that Cardinal Antonelli asked, “Why is Fr. d’Alzon so interested in a question that is really no concern of his?”

Fr. d’Alzon wrote a fine letter explaining the reason for his concern, and he ended by saying, “After all, Your Eminence, this priest is my son; whoever strikes him wounds my heart.”

CASTING THE NET

In 1845, a famous preacher was to give a Sunday evening sermon in the Nîmes cathedral. A large crowd was attracted by his reputation. During the singing of the psalms, Fr. d’Alzon, from his choir stall, had noticed a young man seated near one of the church pillars. His back was turned to the altar and he gazed at the organ. Fr. d’Alzon approached him, tapped him on the shoulder, and gently said to him, “It’s obvious, sir, that you are not a Catholic. May I say to you that the altar is not up there, but at the opposite end of the church.”

Somewhat offended, the young man answered, “Father, I beg your pardon but I know that very well. I am a Catholic.”

¹ Father Galeran himself.

“Then,” said Fr. d’Alzon smiling, “you’re a misdirected Catholic, because you’re facing the wrong way.”

“What do you mean?”

“I only want to help. The sermon is about to begin. Listen carefully and then come to see me and I’ll give you whatever explanations you might need.”

When the young man later came to see him, Fr. d’Alzon took him by the hand and said, “It’s your soul more than your body, which is misdirected. You need to get back on the right road and go to confession.”

“Confess? I never thought about it.”

“True, but I thought about it for you.”

“But I’m not ready.”

“Therefore I shall prepare you, right away. Let’s seize God’s grace as it passes.”

The young man, now as docile as a lamb, placed himself in Father’s hands. He became a fervent Christian and a collaborator in the charitable works of his new friend. He gave me these details himself. He often spoke of this episode gratefully.

Fr. d’Alzon’s life has many examples of such sacred boldness, some of which I shall include in these *Sketches*.

THREE ENGLISH CARDINALS

Fr. d’Alzon knew his contemporaries well, and it would be interesting to publish a collection of his comments on the remarkable men of his day. By correspondence and other means, he was in contact with almost all the true celebrities of the world. I am not exaggerating.

In 1860, as I sometimes helped him with his files which contained letters he insisted on keeping, I jotted down, with his permission, the names of his correspondents. The list was surprisingly long. Later on I shall mention some of them, such as George Stephenson, the famous English engineer, who spoke lengthily with Fr. d’Alzon, in Paris, on a subject of great scientific interest. I kept a summary of it.

I recall also the three great English cardinals, Wiseman, Manning, and Newman, and note how Fr. d’Alzon very accurately and exactly expressed himself on the subject of these three prelates.

He had known Dr. Wiseman well in Rome, where he had often heard him lecture at Cardinal Weld's. For the Nîmes' *Review of Christian Education* he wrote a fine article on the recently published brochure by Wiseman entitled "The Four Latest Popes." Of the eminent man, he said, "He is an outstanding scholar, an accomplished linguist in both ancient and modern languages. But he prefers quiet labor to the tumult of public life. To his fingertips, he is a fine priest, but he is no statesman. He knows books, but he knows men less well. By his zeal and scholarship he does an immense amount of good in London, yet you will see that God will send him a very different kind of successor when, in his mercy, he decides to increase Catholic influence in England. Wiseman is barely English, and what is needed is a pure-blood Englishman from Oxford or Cambridge."

To a former pupil who was pastor of a London parish, he wrote, "Cardinal Manning is really a better theologian than Wiseman, although he is less learned. He is a statesman, and one can see immediately that he is a diplomat. One of his Oxford schoolfellows told me that originally Manning intended to become a diplomat, like Gladstone. He has succeeded in giving the Catholic Church in England an eminent position. Since he has been at the tiller, the ancient cry of 'No Popery' when it has been raised, infrequently, has provoked only ridicule upon whoever utters it. You, who have the honor to serve such a leader, can of course see this for yourself. I would very much like to go and study your great nation personally."

Here is the summary of a conversation about Cardinal Newman before his elevation to the purple: "Wiseman and Manning will always be considered men of immense talent; Newman is a genius. As Englishmen, you can of course appreciate better than we his pure, rich, majestic style. As a thinker, he is amazingly influential in England and world-wide.

"Gladstone said 'The greatest victory of the Roman church since the Reformation has been the conversion of Newman.' And Lord Beaconsfield, 'The greatest blow the Anglican church ever received was the loss of Doctor John Henry Newman.'

"Newman is unlike Cardinal Wiseman and Cardinal Manning. His thoughts rise to sublime, almost inexpressible heights. He uses the

sciences as rungs to climb to regions where his genius is at home, as the English say. As he ascends, he takes in vast horizons; but he is also capable of descending, calmly and effortlessly, to examine even small details. In him, one can find a richness and variety of gifts, any one of which would be sufficient to make him famous. We can easily see how the great doctor influences those around him in an almost magnetic way. He'd be out of place in an episcopal see; administration would kill him, unless he were bishop in mission lands. Manning leads men by will power and peerless administrative ability; Newman enlightens men and conquers them by the splendor of his genius."

Those who knew the three English cardinals, and especially those who lived with them, can attest to the accuracy of Fr. d'Alzon's views. Posterity has judged these men just as did Fr. d'Alzon.

Concerning Cardinal Newman, may I also add this: the independence and subtlety of Newman have occasionally disturbed people and caused them to wonder about the pureness and solidness of his faith. Without doubt, the famous doctor was profoundly Catholic. Yet on some dogmatic points he did not always express himself with the precision of a theology professor. Those who come to the Church from heresy or schism do not overnight convert to Catholic habits, and even less to Catholic theological terminology. Some of Newman's expressions are disturbing; and at times his thought and language were bold when dealing with ideas which may not have been articles of faith but which were very close to them. In 1870, during the Council, he wrote to Bishop Ullathorne of Birmingham a letter which the Protestant press hastened to publish. When Dr. Newman saw excerpts from the letter in the newspapers, he did not recognize his own words and even denied that he had written them. Later he discovered a rough draft of the letter among the papers on his desk, and he promptly wrote to the *Standard* that indeed he had written the letter but that it had been meant to be confidential. It was discovered later that a double-crosser had copied it from the Cardinal's desk while he was absent. Still, once the letter had become public, it could become dangerous.

Father wrote to me from Rome and asked me "to respond to the letter immediately." He added that "the response must come from England, written in French, by a French hand." He indicated that these three

propositions of the author needed a response:

- 1) That the definition of the infallibility was a useless luxury.
- 2) That the Church had never promulgated a dogma unless forced to it, in order to fulfill a rigorous and painful duty.
- 3) That Rome was being led by a clique, and that Mr. Louis Veillot was about to make us suffer in our souls.

I immediately wrote the requested letter which *L'Univers* published on April 12, 1870. Its publication brewed up a storm in England and in Rome. The Birmingham and London Oratories got into the act; in Rome, bishops opposed to the definition of infallibility thought that it was impertinent for a simple priest to dare write against such an eminent man as Dr. Newman. Fr. d'Alzon was pleased with his pupil, and Bishop de Merode stated that Pius IX *was very satisfied*.

NOBLE WORDS AND FINE REACTION

I was chaplain of the Providence convent in Montpellier in 1859. Fr. d'Alzon wrote from Lavagnac, "Tomorrow, my dear friend, I shall come to dine with you and shall bring along Fr. Combalot, who has been spending a few days here with me."

Father arrived punctually, as usual. He held Fr. Combalot by the hand, but seemed rather to be pushed forward by Fr. Combalot, whose impatience was proverbial.

Everything was ready and we sat down at table. Fr. Combalot was silent at first but then he said, "I'm getting old and I want to set aside some money for my old age. That's wise. Bishop....suggested it strongly. He's right. Until now I've spent and given away immoderately."

This unexpected statement hit Fr. d'Alzon like a bomb blast. His eyes blazed. I can still see him turning toward Fr. Combalot and saying, "How you have changed! Fr. Combalot, if there was ever anything admirable in you it was your unselfishness. Now on bad advice, pure gold will be changed into vile lead. The Master, whom you have so well served, did not deserve this lack of confidence in him."

Fr. Combalot leaped from his chair and flung his napkin away. "Ah, the serpent in the grass! Yes, that treacherous advice would have been my downfall. Fr. d'Alzon, indeed I thank you."

This little episode reveals the fine moral character of these two great men.

HOSPITALITY DEFENDED

Fr. d'Alzon had the manners of a noble lord, enhanced by the grandeur of Christian charity. He entertained many guests at Assumption College and often invited them to dinner. He was a fine host whose hospitality was gracious and elaborate though not extravagant. One day a student complained about what he called "an endless succession of feasts." Fr. d'Alzon heard about the complaint and the next day said good-naturedly to the school assembly, "Mr. de L... peeked at my guests through the window shutters and carefully noted the various dishes that were being served, since he was able to mention many of them to his friends. It is obvious that he would not have complained if he had been invited. I must justify myself to him, so it seems, and to do so I shall make only one remark. I am the vicar-general, who in canon law is defined as the 'person of the bishop.'¹ Now St. Paul says of a bishop, among other things, that 'the bishop must be hospitable.' It follows logically that the vicar-general also should be hospitable. When Mr. de L... will have graduated from college and returns here as a visitor, he will be pleased to see that Fr. d'Alzon knows St. Paul a bit, especially concerning hospitality."

The classmates of Mr. de L... took it upon themselves to let him know that his remarks had been improper, and he never spoke like that again.

TWO SNUFF BOXES

Bishop Cart of Nîmes snuffed a lot. One day he suggested to Fr. d'Alzon, who had complained of mental fatigue, that he should take a bit of snuff. The result was immediate and positive. As the bishop wanted Fr. d'Alzon to always have some snuff available, he gave him a superb silver-gilt snuff box, saying to him, "It's full. Whenever you get low on snuff, come back for a refill."

At the time Fr. d'Alzon's room was above the parlor, where, I believe, Fr. Matthieu now has his room. I often saw the fine snuff box on the mantel there. One day, it disappeared. I asked Father about it.

"Don't say anything about it," he said. "I'm afraid the bishop will ask

me about it. I don't know too well what I would say to him. The holy pastor of N... came here one day, and he kept his snuff in an old box the cover of which was held by a leather thong. Imagine! I gave him the vermeil box and kept his." Thus Fr. d'Alzon got a cobbler's snuff box, worth maybe fifteen centimes. I don't know how things turned out with the bishop, if it ever came up.

A SCALDED HAND

In 1849, Father was preaching a series of sermons in the Nîmes cathedral. One day, shortly before the evening sermon, he upset a kettle of boiling water on his left hand. It was a painful burn, the skin blistered, and the wound lasted for a long time. Still, right after the accident he had to leave to preach. It was suggested that someone go to the cathedral to explain what had occurred and that obviously the preacher could not appear that evening. But Father did not want to disappoint his audience. He bandaged his hand and left, despite atrocious pain. He had someone place in the pulpit a bucket of ice water in which he plunged his hand during the entire sermon. Of course his gestures were restricted, but his eloquence was as fiery as usual. The members of the audience seated closest to the pulpit must have thought at times an invisible hand was spraying them or that rain was dripping from a crack in the vaulting.

CONVERSING WITH GOD

Fr. d'Alzon was very skillful in conversing with God, especially in his devotion to the Eucharist. In his long talks with Our Lord, he combined a lively faith with a childlike familiarity, a sort of easygoing exchange with an indulgent friend.

One day, probably in 1859, returning from Lavagnac, he dropped in to see me in Montpellier. He seemed tired, sad, worried.

"My son," he said, "I stopped here because I must take up a serious matter with Our Lord. I'm going into your chapel, behind the altar. I don't need anything; just let me stay there alone."

Upon entering the chapel, he prostrated himself before the altar. I left. An hour and a half later, he emerged, totally changed. His face was happy and there was a smile in his eyes which were still filled with the tears of tenderness which he must have shed.

“My good friend,” he said, “what a good Master we serve. We have reason to call him the ‘Infinite Goodness.’ If we understood what we have in the tabernacle, we would spend our days at the feet of the Lord. What joy to be able to speak to him, heart to heart.”

I shall never forget the emotion with which he spoke these touching words.

FATHER D’ALZON’S MASS

Fr. d’Alzon celebrated the Eucharist with great piety and dignity, but he was quite rapid, never taking more than twenty minutes. He had got into this habit because of the people who attended, such as servant girls and mothers of families. His preparation was lengthy and his thanksgiving lasted as long as the needs of his active ministry would allow. Assumption students were disappointed when someone else said Mass or preached. In our opinion, he was irreplaceable, and that was very true.

A NOVEL WAY OF PREACHING

As a preacher, Fr. d’Alzon was always fresh and original, in varying degrees. He didn’t always see things the way others did, but he saw things well. He had fresh insights, unexpected outbursts, charming witticisms, and above all he was practical. It has been a long time since I was at Assumption College, but over the years I have met many alumni who still remembered the main ideas of Father’s instructions. You have only to read Cardinal de Cabrières’ Fiftieth Anniversary speech, or Canon Camille Ferry’s *Histoire de l’Assomption* to see that I am right. Cardinal de Cabrières, unfortunately, touched only lightly upon things that he could have dealt with in greater detail.

One Saturday evening, after the chanting of the litanies, in the tiny old chapel, Fr. d’Alzon suddenly began his talk thus, “Gentlemen, did you ever see Fr. Mat ton, former pastor of St. Baudile, now deceased? He was very ugly, with a big nose, or rather schnozz, on a face the shape and color of a tomato. He had tiny little black eyes that seemed drilled into his head. Add to that a mop of white hair, badly combed, half-covered by an old leather skullcap. This is an exact picture. What do you think? Well, I’ll tell you frankly that I often saw this priest at prayer, especially during his thanksgiving. I knelt very near to him, in order to

see him at an angle, to examine his face and the holiness of his expression. I remembered faces that were esthetically perfect with fine features and exact proportions. These faces had never impressed me. I had not found them handsome. Why not? Where does beauty come from? What does it consist of? Let us, once and for all, have clear ideas about this. Sacred Scripture has an expression that answers our questions: “the inner man is renewed day by day” (II Cor 4:16). True beauty reflects the soul. The more a soul is perfect, the more the exterior expression is beautiful. At the resurrection, our bodies will be transformed in direct ratio to the transfiguration of our souls...

From such a beginning, Fr. d’Alzon went on to a fine development of the idea. It was one of the most original and interesting instructions I ever heard.

RESPECT FOR SACRED THINGS

One day Fr. Henri Brun was washing some purificators and corporals in the doorway of the old sacristy, which was then right next to Fr. d’Alzon’s office. I approached and a rather noisy conversation began. Suddenly, Fr. d’Alzon stormed out of his office and addressed me severely, “Young man, I thought you had more sense and tact. Here is a priest washing the cloths touched by Our Lord’s body; and while he is thus occupied with a job which is not beneath the dignity of the angels, you stand there laughing and talking nonsense.”

He closed his office door...perfect silence. I left immediately. That was more than forty years ago, and I still hold it against Fr. Brun who had not come to my rescue, by declaring that he had spoken to me first.

FATHER’S AMBITION

In the courtyard of Assumption, Father was saying to a young priest whom he liked, “You should go to the Near East as a missionary.” Another religious spoke up, “He could become a bishop there.” Fr. d’Alzon said, “I don’t insist that my sons become bishops; I want them to become saints. Give me holy men, especially men totally free of worldly concerns, and I shall extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. I have no other ambition. I have that one, I will admit, to a supreme degree, by the grace of God.”

ENGLAND AND RUSSIA

Father once wrote to a friend in England, "I must admit that I fear, given the rapid progress of the loss of faith, that the Lord will transfer to England the torch (of faith) of France."

Later, on August 17, 1878, he wrote to this same friend, a former pupil, "I study Russia a great deal. I am irresistibly drawn to following the movements of this colossus which God seems to shake up in order to bring it where it doesn't want to go. When Providence wanted to renew the diseased blood of Europe, it sent countless barbarian battalions, which the Church baptized and made its own. Something tells me that Russia has a mission toward the Catholic Church and the Holy See. The Latin races have proven unfaithful; their governments have become persecutors. Shall we see salvation come from the icy steppes of the vast empire? When and how? The observant eye of the Christian cannot turn away from this direction, from which arises a phenomenon as yet indistinct and unclear, but which each day takes on astonishing proportions. There is there a powerful ferment for great evil or for immense good. I lean toward hoping for good."

When Fr. d'Alzon wrote this letter, he had begun collecting serious books about Russia. They are still carefully kept in the college library in Nîmes. One can easily see that they were read and re-read.

A "HIGH CLASS" HUMILIATION

An aristocratic young lady from Southern France, who died as a religious some years ago, had chosen Fr. d'Alzon as her spiritual director. She advanced zealously, even impetuously, toward perfection. One day she told her director, "I beg you to impose upon me some good humiliation."

Father listened without responding. Some days later, she came to the College to return to the sacristan some extremely precious guipure lace, several yards long, which she had undertaken to repair. She met Fr. d'Alzon in the yard and he asked her what she wanted. "Show me the lace," he said. Having examined the lace, he shook his head as if in doubt. To the woman, astonished by his silence and his way of acting, he said, "Follow me." He then entered the faculty library. Unrolling the lace, he began to measure it carefully along the edge of the table, the

way merchants do along the measure on their counters. He stopped, thought a moment, shook his head, and began to measure again. The annoyed woman exclaimed, "What do you mean? Do you think that I've kept a piece of the guipure for myself?"

Silence, another shake of the head, and Fr. d'Alzon began measuring a third time. The exasperated woman cried out, "This is too much. I am not a thief." And she stormed out, slamming the door. The next day she came back humbly and said to Father, "Forgive me. Yesterday I didn't understand what you were trying to teach me. I asked for humiliation but I didn't expect that."

Smiling, Fr. d'Alzon answered, "My dear child, know that the best humiliations are the unexpected, the unchosen ones. Didn't you get exactly what you were looking for?"

AN INSTINCT FOR BEAUTY

Bishop Besson of Nîmes sent to his diocesan clergy, on the occasion of Fr. d'Alzon's death, a pastoral letter which is deservedly a masterpiece. The famous priest's portrait is drawn with a masterly hand. It's almost like a Hans Holbein portrait in its truthful expression, lively color, precise details, and strong lines, idealizing the noble head while preserving a faithful resemblance.

There is one phrase in the letter which strikes me as somewhat inexact. Bp. Besson wrote, "Fr. d'Alzon, having received so much from nature, never stopped increasing, by study, the scope of his knowledge. No branch of learning escaped him, except possibly architecture and music." Bp. Besson said "possibly" and that allows me to correct an inexact statement without seeming to contradict a conscientious and eminently capable biographer.

Fr. d'Alzon sang off-key and had a tin-ear musically. Yet he had a fine instinct for music, especially religious music. At Assumption College, he insisted on beautiful chant for the Mass and various liturgical offices. When he founded a monastic congregation, he established choral office. He tried, by various means, to have the chant executed as perfectly as possible, to have the sacred liturgy celebrated with all the splendor which the Church seeks.

Cardinal de Cabrières deserves to be quoted here, "Who does not

know that, despite the fact that he himself was not musically inclined, he gave splendor to the religious ceremonies, to the celebration of Christian feasts, by wonderful liturgical chant and beautiful vestments? He took pleasure in familiarizing us with the prayers of the Breviary and the Missal. No ancient Benedictine ever tasted so intimately the sweetness of the traditional prayers of the Roman church.”

Today, the Assumptionists everywhere take pride in religious offices conducted according to precise liturgical rules. They have adopted a plain-chant method which is truly majestic and pure in its expression.

Concerning architecture, I can state without fear of contradiction that Fr. d’Alzon had good taste and admired the arts: architecture, sculpture, and painting. He spoke of them as does a true connoisseur. In Nîmes, while I was yet only a child, he once made me see the difference between the noble, graceful columns of the Maison Carrée and those of a modern theatre across the street, which were ugly, heavy, and, according to Father’s expression, “absolutely lacked style.”

For churches, he preferred the ogival style, especially the radiating Gothic. Later, when he had studied the works of Pugin, the great restorer of Gothic in England, he came to prefer English Gothic with its lancet windows, its simplicity and majesty, as in the Cathedral of Salisbury. One day, in the sacristy of the Nîmes cathedral, an old canon said of the fine Romanesque church of St. Paul, with its fine frescoes by Flandrin, “It looks like a wig-maker’s shop.” Fr. d’Alzon immediately came to the defense of art. He gave an art lesson, mixed with fine irony, to this old canon who had demeaned a monument of which the inhabitants of Nîmes are justly proud. Those present say that Fr. d’Alzon surprised them by the extent of his knowledge and by the clear manner in which he spoke of the beauty of the Romanesque style and the beauty of the mural paintings.

When in Rome, he often visited the Vatican and the various basilicas. He often spoke of the “impression of triumph” one senses in St. Peter’s, of the elegant grandeur of the facade of St. John Lateran, of the beauty of lines of Michelangelo’s cloister for the Carthusian Monastery of the Baths.

He admired the famous statue of the *Dying Gladiator*. He liked to linger lengthily before it, and he said, “The more I study it, the more I’m

convinced that it is not a gladiator but a Christian, or that the artist had seen Christians die before he ever sculptured his marble. This statue is maybe the masterpiece of an art which is in the process of passing from the human ideal of form to the supernatural ideal of Christian expression and attitude. Notice his calmness and resignation. This man watches his blood flow yet never raises his hand to beg Caesar to spare his life. He inclines his head slightly as if he were falling asleep. This is not the death of a gladiator! On his brow shine the rays of heavenly hope.”

In the Vatican, whenever he had the time, he never missed going to the tiny chapel of St. Nicholas, the parish church of the pontifical palace, right near Raphael’s *Stanze*, to see Fra Angelico’s fine frescoes.

I could say much more. What did he not try in order to bring back good taste to our churches? How he tried to replace the stiff French chasubles by soft and graceful vestments! To do so, he exposed himself to the sarcasms of people whose only rule is routine.

To an extremely high degree, he had a sense of beauty. His poetic soul expanded enthusiastically in the face of Nature. At Lavagnac, he loved to walk down a lonely row of stately trees whose massive branches gave him peaceful and refreshing shade. He never missed bringing friends to see this charming spot.

Those who went on pilgrimage with him to Notre-Dame de Rochefort recall his unaffected joy when, after a long night’s march, he saw the first sunrays above the horizon. Bit by bit, the fog above the Rhone and the Durance disappeared in the heat, while the song of the skylark pierced the morning air. Father then forgot all fatigue and began humming a happy tune. “Ah,” he would say, “see how good God is! Once again he sends his sun to chase away the mist. Like the lark, let us spread our wings and fly far above earth toward God’s great sun. Like the tiniest bird, we have no need to put our prayer into words. Let us take pleasure in seeing, smelling, chirping, rejoicing in thanking God for the wonderful things he gives us.”

Yes, Fr. d’Alzon had an instinct for beauty, in art and in Nature. But it was more than an instinct, because he reasoned out his impressions, he studied. Neither architecture nor music remained unknown to him.

SIGHS AND “DEAR ME’S”

Fr. d’Alzon’s piety was profound; he passionately loved Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin. Yet exteriorly his unfeigned piety revealed itself with a certain forthrightness. He hated phony piety and detested fanciful devotions. In a word, to use an expression popular in Southern France, “he didn’t confuse butterflies with angels,” nor long sighs with spiritual impulses.

One day, I was with him in a city, not Nîmes, which I need not identify. By chance, we met Fr. N..., an excellent and worthy priest, chaplain of nuns, who always seemed to be emerging from a shower of mysticism — uttering long sighs that were neither natural nor supernatural — and ending almost every sentence with glances toward heaven and languorous “Dear me’s.”

Father was on pins and needles, but he managed to put on a bold front until the very end, as if the conversation really interested him. His turn came later. As he was saying goodbye to the priest, he suddenly said, “By the way, Father, when are you taking the veil? I want to preach at the ceremony. Don’t forget!”

As we walked away, Father said to me, “Son, let’s become saints, and let’s pray that we will never join the Congregation of the Holy Sighs and insipid ‘Dear me’s.’”

BROTHER AND SISTER

Fr. d’Alzon had two sisters, who died before he did: Mme de Puységur and Mlle Augustine d’Alzon. Augustine, the younger, was his favorite sister. She was a tender and devoted friend and a tried and true confidante. She understood her brother, whom she deeply admired. She was the intermediary between father, mother, and son when the son sought help for his various undertakings and charities, something that happened often.

I read some of the letters of Mlle Augustine to Fr. Vernières, a family friend. She spoke constantly of her brother, whether he was in Rome, Paris, or Nîmes. She followed his career closely, and we can see that, after God, he was her prime concern. In an undated letter which I have here before me, she wrote from Lavagnac to Fr. Vernières, pastor of Montferrier:

“Hasten to come to Lavagnac because my brother is about to arrive from Rome. We are immensely happy. Better than anyone else, you know what consolations fill my heart. Come to share this family reunion. You have every right to do so because of all the good you have done for my brother who would be saddened were you not here upon his arrival.

Mother begs me to tell you not to forget to notify us of the time of your arrival. She wanted to send a carriage for you but something broke and we had to send it to Montpellier for repairs. We will send you a saddle horse at Gignac.

Do you know that ever since you preached here before Mama, on the duties of daughters, she no longer treats us as daughters, because she doesn't want to spoil us? Hurry to preach another sermon, on the duties of mothers toward their daughters, and don't forget to mention that they must treat them, at least, with charity.

My brother is coming. Then everything will be all right. Let's hope he is not delayed. I count the days, hours, minutes. I travel with him from Rome here — my mind never leaving him.”

Mlle Augustine's affection was amply returned. The young priest's confidante became his advisor. If only the letters between them had been preserved for us. What riches of affection, piety, and zeal we would discover.

Mlle Augustine's death was a great shock to Fr. d'Alzon. She died a holy death, but he was nonetheless so deeply saddened that only the thought of absolute submission to God's will could console him. During this period, I often found him in his room, his head buried in his hands, weeping bitterly as he remembered his sister. He often repeated these words, which came back upon his lips at the moment of his own death, “Let us submit to God's will. He is the master.”

“You see,” he once told me, “I have something here which consoles me.” And he took from his desk a small engraving of the head of Christ dying upon the Cross. “Do you see this expression, with eyes closed and lips open? That's exactly the expression and attitude of Augustine at her death.”

I might add here that Fr. d'Alzon faithfully remembered the dead

whom he never forgot in his prayers. The last words he ever wrote to me, from the Carthusian Monastery of Valbonne in 1880, shortly before his death, were, “Unfortunately, everything dwindles, especially charity, even toward the dead.”

CANDIDATE FOR GENERAL COUNCIL

In 1859, the electorate of Montpellier asked Fr. d’Alzon to become a candidate for the General Council and he accepted to do so. A committee was formed with Mr. de Ginestous as president. Political meetings were held in his home and it was there that Fr. d’Alzon delivered some remarkable speeches. I was lucky enough to hear the first one and I give here some of the main passages, from notes which I took immediately after the meeting.

I must say at the outset that his candidacy was opposed strongly by the imperial government (of Napoleon III), represented by Mr. Gavini, prefect of the Hérault, by the diocesan administration and many clergymen, and by the anti-legitimist party. Fr. d’Alzon realized that he had no chance of winning, but he never hesitated to present himself in order to proclaim social and political principles based squarely on a Christian spirit. This was his position from the very start.

It was evening, after working hours, in the vast salon of Mr. de Ginestous. The audience was large, made up of aristocrats, middle-class, and quite a few workers. Erect and impressive, Fr. d’Alzon stood at the corner of a table and had this to say:

“Gentlemen:

I must first of all thank you for the honor you do me in accepting me as your candidate. Let me say frankly, right now, that my chances of winning are doubtful. You and I proceed openly...we know little of intrigue or the manipulation of influence. And I say with great pride that we avoid using means which guarantee victory at the price of honor.

Everything which our opponents have said or written comes back to the following three points:

- 1) Why has Fr. d’Alzon become a candidate for the General Council?
- 2) Of what service can a priest be on the General Council?

- 3) D'Alzon is a legitimist. Does he intend to oppose the imperial government?

Here is my answer. I present myself because my fellow-citizens, using their freedom and their rights under the law of the land, have asked me to accept this mission to defend and protect their privileges in the General Council.

I have accepted the candidacy because I am just as interested personally as are all the greatest landowners. Frankly, it is well known — my enemies know it as well as do my friends — that I am one of the richest priests in Southern France. I am an only son and my father's fortunes consist not only of revenue-producing capital, but also of buildings, vineyards, fields and forests which in the Hérault alone, not to speak of other departments, add up to considerable holdings. It follows that I am truly interested in the General Council, which deals mainly with agriculture and land-holdings.

Another reason belongs to an entirely different order. Are we or are we not a free people? Do we have freedom under the law? If so, I remind my opponents that a branch of the Rochefoucauld family bears on its coat-of-arms a siren bathing, and the motto is, 'Such is my pleasure.' Let's leave aside the siren in her bath and concentrate only on the motto. I say to my opponents that I present myself for the General Council because it pleases me to do so. I present myself because I do not draw back from a duty when my fellow citizens ask me to present myself. And that is what I say to you, the electorate.

Now for my second point: a priest's action, whether people like it or not, is not restricted to the four walls of his sacristy. The King of Kings, Master of empires, did not open to his priests the doors of a sacristy. He opened the world to them and said, 'Go forth and teach.' There were no General Councils in Our Lord's day. Had there been, do you think that Jesus would have forbidden his apostles from becoming members? An African priest, Tertullian, once wrote to Caesar, 'We are everywhere; we leave you only your temples.'

I do not believe that the interests of eternity and those of time are so separate that anyone busy with the one has nothing at all to do with the others. Time leads to eternity; by earthly things we prepare the things of eternal life.

The Catholic Church has never neglected the areas with which the General Councils are concerned. Is it not to the monk, Dom Perignon, procurator of the Hautvillers Abbey, that we owe the method of preparing champagne wines and making them sparkling? How many bridges, highways, canals did the monks build? How many ponds did they make dry, and swamps make healthy? A priest is not out of place on a General Council.

My opponent, it is true, introduced refined sulfur as a treatment for grapevines. We are grateful to him, but we ask if only vines need healing. The vines are sulfured but the working class and the poor still suffer. Forgive the pun... it expresses my thought. Don't we need to think of the education of children? Watch over public mores? Protect industrial development? Maintain order, peace, and well-being among workers? Must we not be the friends of the people? Who knows and loves the people better than the priest, who is always in contact with them?

Fr. d'Alzon, it is said, is a legitimist and seeks to oppose the government. Fr. d'Alzon, I answer, knows his catechism well enough to know that one must respect those in authority. He does not ignore that an eminently practical man, St. Paul, said, 'Obey your masters, even when they are ill-humored.' I am not the one who is opposing the government. It is the government that opposes my candidacy through its agents whom it sends everywhere to influence the voters. It even acts upon the clergy whom it intimidates or lulls by promises that probably will never be kept.

Fellow voters, if despite all opposition I am elected, be assured that I shall be faithful to my mandate. I will remain independent and worthy because I shall be the representative of independent and worthy men.

As a Christian and as a priest, I belong to that long line which never opposed Caesar in the things that belong to Caesar. But in the things that belong to God, the most precious of which are the souls he has redeemed, I shall never bend the knee to Caesar or to anyone else.

I shall fight for freedom, because like St. Columkille I believe that 'Whoever takes my freedom also takes my dignity.' It is the dignity of the working class and of the poor that I want to defend. Gentlemen, I feel in my heart that I am ready for any sacrifice, determined to obtain

for all my fellow-citizens, in all levels of society, that Christian liberty which alone can give peace and joy, honor and dignity!”

As I re-read these notes, taken so long ago, I applaud and cry out “Bravo.” You too, my Assumptionist brothers, should applaud and cry out “Bravo.”

Fr. d’Alzon was not elected. The defeat was expected. But we had to applaud his effort to shake things up. We are glad to have heard the wonderful speeches of a candidate famous for his patriotism and his profound knowledge of social and political questions.

LITTLE CANDY PRIESTS

Years ago, small candy priests were sold at every fair in Southern France. Up North they had their gingerbread men. The fair at Gignac, not far from the Château of Lavagnac, was famous for its candy priests, which were better than all others in appearance and taste. Besides, they had a distinctive characteristic: they had the old-fashioned tasseled biretta or four-cornered hat.

Imagine, if you will, a tiny piece of candy, the size of your thumb, in the shape of a priest, with cassock, cincture, rabat, and square bonnet. There were beady little eyes and healthy, fresh rosy-red cheeks. These round and ruddy faces were the supreme achievement of the confectioners’ art.

Fr. d’Alzon liked to recall that, as a child, he was crazy about these little candy priests. He’d have devoured dozens if he’d been allowed to. His childhood tantrums were calmed by the promise of a candy priest. Emmanuel’s craving for such sweets was so great that even later on, when he was a priest and vicar-general, the real priests whose superior he was would never let him forget the candy priests of Gignac. If perchance he was in town during the fair, he’d stop and look longingly at the candy priests, but he never bought any.

At Assumption College there was an excellent student from the Gignac region, H.R. ..., who became a seminarian at Montpellier. Soon after, he came to visit his former teachers at Nîmes. Fr. d’Alzon was in the courtyard when he arrived. He cried out, “Ah! here is one of my fine candy priests from Gignac,” and he burst out laughing. In reality, H.R. ... was short, round-faced, dark-eyed, and rosy-checked, as if he had been

fashioned by a Gignac confectioner. From that moment on, Fr. d'Alzon called him only "my little candy priest from Gignac." The young cleric gaily went along with the appellation. This same H.R. ... whom the students loved so much that they called him the "Good King," is mentioned in my sketch "Etiquette lesson."

GEORGE STEPHENSON

In 1845 or 1846, Fr. d'Alzon met in Paris with the famous English engineer, George Stephenson, who in 1814 had invented the first locomotive able to travel faster than seven kilometers per hour. In 1829, he had perfected his invention with the "Flying Rocket" able to travel 38 kilometers an hour. Fr. d'Alzon was deeply impressed by Stephen's manners and conversation. He even noted down what the famous engineer had told him about the art of building machinery. Later on he shared these notes with his students. In a summary written in 1848, he notes that Stephenson had this to say: "You ask me what the qualities of a perfect machine should be? Given the greatest possible power of the machine, it is perfect when it has precision, simplicity, durability, and quietness.

Precision: it produces exactly the desired effect.

Simplicity: in construction, parts, gearing. Note this: the multiplicity of parts, their combination and finish, reveal the worker's skill; their simplicity reveals the genius of the maker. A simple machine seldom breaks down. If it breaks down, it is easily repaired and thus has durability. When the machine is powerful, precise, simple, and well-running, it is perfect provided it is also quiet. Noise, in the universe, is disorderly: storm, wind, blizzard. God is not found in commotion. I've sought these qualities in my machines. I haven't succeeded completely. But see this fine precision watch that I'm wearing. In my office at Newcastle, right in the middle of my workshops, I can place my watch on my desk and hear its ticking clearly, even when all the machines are running.

"Don't forget, a machine is like a person: those who use it must know it well in order to use it efficiently. Every machine has its good points and its flaws, its own temperament, so to speak. To the person who knows the machine well, it will prove most useful; to others, it will be a

useless piece of furniture.

“From the moral point of view, a machine completes man in the same way as a sword completes a soldier. It can never replace him. Just as a man brandishing a sword is respected, so a man, at the service of a machine, must not be caught up by those who use him, nor considered like a spring or other part, even an essential piece. Man must be treated with respect and not allowed to become a machine, without heart and especially without religious enlightenment. The practice of moral virtue is more valuable than all inventions put together.”

My notes are more ample than what I present here. They go into considerable detail, and some day I shall publish them. But each *Sketch* must not become a treatise.

TWO READINGS

Fr. d’Alzon read admirably well; his diction was clear, his accent distinguished. He emphasized without declamation; he had the knack of highlighting the most beautiful passages. A sort of electric current was set up between him and his listeners. Whenever he preached, he poured his whole soul into the souls of his audience, penetrating, captivating, fascinating. His face reflected the impressions of his spirit.

Alumni especially remember two public readings. The first was delivered around 1847, on the occasion of the first visit to Assumption College of Fr. de Cazalès, the translator of Catherine Emmerich. In the old chapel, Fr. d’Alzon read us the chapter on the Scourging of Christ. We were in tears and Father himself was deeply moved. Our hearts overflowed with love for Our Lord, so cruelly tortured for us.

On another occasion, in the study hall of the older boys, after our class in Church history which Father taught, he read to us the “Dialogue between Plato and Fénelon” from the masterpiece by Fr. Gerbet, *Annales Philosophiques*. In it the Archbishop of Cambrai recounts the death of Albert de La Ferronnays. Fr. d’Alzon had known almost all the characters in the sublime story, and his reading and commentary made a very deep impression upon us. Later, I heard the same passage read in London by Pauline de La Ferronnays (then Mrs. Craven), and though the reading was very moving, it did not come up to Fr. d’Alzon’s inimitable performance.

FRIENDLY REUNION

Father Monsabré once came to preach the annual student retreat at Assumption College. The future preacher of Notre-Dame was outstanding; teachers and pupils alike were struck by his fiery, virile eloquence, his lofty thoughts couched in simple terms understandable by even the youngest pupils. His afternoon talks were sparkling with wit and humor, and were even more interesting because of the anecdotes which Fr. Monsabré could tell so well.

After the evening exercises, Fr. d'Alzon would gather a small group of friends in his rooms. At the time, he lived in a section called "The Pavilion," overlooking Feuchères Avenue. The room was tiny, inconvenient, and so poorly designed that there was always a terrible draft between door and window. It had a fireplace with a very shallow opening, and winds from any direction except northeast sent smoke billowing back into the room. Near the chimney was an alcove with a camp-cot, and a tiny chest of drawers at the head of the bed.

To the left, as one entered the room, was a work desk of white pine boards. To the right, was a pile of green cartons containing papers, notes, and many letters, a rich mine of precious documents now lost, burned by Fr. d'Alzon shortly before his death. Between the boxes and the window, in a corner stood a bookshelf with some choice books: St. Augustine, Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Thomassin, a few volumes of Dr. Newman, and a half-dozen volumes of the Elzévir edition of the major classical authors. The only decoration on the mantelpiece was two larch-wood candlesticks from Chamonix.

The furniture was modest and scarce, but still it allowed little room for chairs. Father could seat only three guests; with difficulty we managed to squeeze in a fourth chair. We passed a wonderful evening listening to the three great men: Fr. d'Alzon, Fr. Monsabré, and Mr. Germer-Durand. Fr. d'Alzon was very merry despite the fact that he was suffering from a persistent cough. This did not prevent him from trying to sing Magali's song, from Mistral's *Mireio*: "O Magali, ma tant aimado!"

Fr. d'Alzon's voice was unmusical, permanently off-key. Add a bad cold to that, and you will have some idea of the sounds that came from his chest and his lips as he tried to interpret the tender Provençal song.

Let's say nothing of Father's pronunciation, which he never could get right. Fr. Monsabré was doubled up from laughter. Fr. d'Alzon often interrupted himself to laugh heartily, until finally he gave up and left Mr. Germer-Durand to finish the song alone.

Fr. Monsabré then improvised a song to celebrate the talent and especially the good-will of the off-key virtuoso, with his tin-ear but with noble heart and good will. I remember only the first verse:

Objet chéri de ma plus pure flamme sung to the tune of:

*Ils sont là-bas qui dorment sous la neige
Et le tambour ne les réveille plus!*

It sounded like a love song sung to the tune of the *Dies irae!*

Another evening, we didn't sing; but there was between Fr. d'Alzon and Mr. Germer-Durand a lively exchange of wit, erudition and knowledge. They improvised a historical novel in the genre of Cardinal Wiseman's *Fabiola*. Fr. d'Alzon started, Mr. Germer-Durand continued, and they swapped back and forth until the story was complete. Their narration blended admirably and resulted in a harmonious whole.

The story dealt with a patrician Christian family fleeing persecution in Rome and establishing itself in Nîmes. The father was Bulbus, the mother was Flavia, and they had two sons and a daughter. In the vicinity of Nemausus (Nîmes), they purchased a property still known as Mas de Boulbon, named after Bulbus.

Mr. Germer-Durand drew upon his vast archeological and epigraphical knowledge, while Fr. d'Alzon drew from his heart and faith the description of the Rome of the Catacombs. Bulbus' two sons became priests, and the daughter consecrated her virginity to God. One after another the family members received the martyr's crown. The story was most interesting. It was marvelous to hear these two great men use their minds and their hearts to narrate episodes of a brilliant and learned improvisation.

Forgive my entering into details of this intimate life. Fr. d'Alzon's sons, our dear Assumptionists, will better recognize the heart, mind, and cheerful disposition of their holy founder. Nothing can surpass in charm and interest what we can honestly call family scenes. I thank God every day that I was able to witness them.

A final characteristic note: on these occasions, Fr. d'Alzon served an excellent tea, which he prepared himself in his fire place or on a tiny alcohol lamp. He served it in common everyday tea cups. We took our sugar from a round larch-wood box and stirred it with a little larch-wood spoon, the same material as the candlesticks were made of.

ADVICE TO NOVICES

The writer knows that he is about to place his finger between two rocks, or stick his foot into a hornets' nest. So be it, because he has undertaken to show the more intimate side of Fr. d'Alzon, come what may, even if it proves that he profited little from the lessons which he was taught.

Fr. d'Alzon was an "original", as he himself admitted. You have only to read his *Mémoires d'un ancien* if you need convincing. However, we must be clear in our terminology. What is an "original"? A person who resembles no one else, is not run-of-the-mill, and stands out precisely because he is different from most people. The saints were great originals. Men with a mission to put society back on the right track are originals. If Nero had kept a diary, he would surely have noted that Peter and Paul were two proud originals that he had to get rid of.

Nevertheless, even saints have a model upon whom they pattern themselves: Christ, God and man. Fr. d'Alzon always kept this divine model in view. He allowed himself to be guided by the Church, with the simplicity of a child, but then he strode ahead, not worrying about the opinions of others. In this sense, Fr. d'Alzon is an original.

He wanted to leave behind him disciples filled with this same spirit. As a result, at least in the eyes of the world, he founded a Congregation of "originals." Let it be noted also that these "originals" are followed, in their works and in their pilgrimages, by a vast multitude. This proves that society has many "originals." Thank God, their number is increasing.

Speaking to some French officers one Christmas, Pius IX began by saying, "In the *primordes* of the Church." The word was not French (nor is it English), but it was found to be well-chosen and expressive. Allow me therefore to say: In the *primordes* of the Congregation of the Assumptionists, when there were yet no *Constitutions*, nor rules, nor

Customary, nor even a special religious habit, when everything was still the chaos which precedes a fine creation, Fr. d'Alzon quietly selected a few disciples and told them of his plans. He paid special attention to the youngsters he had chosen. He took them aside and instructed and guided them. He regulated their spiritual exercises, their readings, their small mortifications. Here is a brief summary of his spiritual advice, jotted down by one of his semi-novices in early 1846:

“Avoid singularity and exaggeration. Don't be sulky, but remain even-tempered. Be dignified in your manners, without being affected. Don't put on sanctimonious airs, and don't try to show the angels the whites of your eyes when you pray, meditate, or contemplate. In your meditations, simply let yourself go, and don't try to turn your meditations into theological treatises.

“Above all, cherish the devotions of the Church, which you must prefer to your own fanciful devotions. Love the liturgy, the plain-chant, the Divine Office. In everything, retain freedom of the spirit, gentleness, and good humor. A holy religious whom I once knew used to say, ‘You have to get used to praying somewhat *rondibiliter* at a good rate, because the Lord loves a cheerful giver.’¹

“Be relaxed, free and easy when you eat, and don't be like the beasts in the fields, who are hunched over their food.

“Learn the art of talking to God, speak freely with Our Lord. Serve his majesty generously, with loyal love. Know how to converse with him, listen to him. Say often, ‘Speak Lord, for your servant listens,’ and you will hear his voice. Or more exactly, you will feel something infinitely sweet penetrate your soul and enlighten your spirit. Have that kind of faith that the superior of a nuns' convent had when she rapped on the door of the tabernacle and said, ‘Lord, I'm just letting you know that we have no more bread to eat.’

“Have your own chosen mortifications. For example: it's terribly hot and you're walking in the country and you're very thirsty. There's a cool brook, in the shade of a tree. What luck! Then you remember the Crucified Lord and his great thirst. You say, ‘Lord, I will not drink,’ and you don't. Be ingenious in this way. Don't count very much on yourself; count only on God's grace without which you can do nothing. Thank him without ceasing, for having preserved you from sin or for having

raised you when you were fallen. Be like St. Philip Neri. Upon receiving news of some scandal, he would fall to his knees crying, ‘Lord, I’d be capable of even worse if your grace did not sustain me.’”

Father once had this to say to a pupil who was rather hard to get along with because he was inclined to be misanthropic: “Cheer up, my friend. You always seem to be at war with the whole human race. Everyone must put up with your faults, but you think that you have the right to complain about the faults of others. If you were the least bit clever, you’d turn your sour disposition back upon yourself alone and then you’d be a saint. Passions are forces, and you must learn to use them to your advantage, not to your loss.”

One could write a very useful book full of Fr. d’Alzon’s thoughts. It would contain a wealth of useful advice. I write only about what I personally know. Fr. Emmanuel must have gathered immense riches, which he will share with us some day. That’s why I avoid mentioning what he knows as well, if not better, than I.

Some day I plan to present a collection of extracts from Fr. d’Alzon’s letters of spiritual direction, to lay persons as well as religious, male and female, precious documents which special circumstances placed in my hands.

HEADMASTER

However one considers Fr. d’Alzon, he is astonished by the multiple outstanding gifts that made him a great man. To limn a portrait of him, we would have to consider him successively as preacher, professor, confessor, man of society and conversation, lecturer on religious and political topics, founder and legislator. Let us first consider him as headmaster of Assumption College.

I consider this study important because we find in it the wonderful qualities which he brought to all his undertakings and which, taken together, comprise what we call the spirit of Fr. d’Alzon or the spirit of the Assumption.

Ernest Daudet said of him, “All his pupils loved him passionately.” True, but all did not follow Father’s example: Daudet himself wandered far away from the house of a Father whose memory he still cherished deeply.

Father was loved, but he was feared too; he had a great heart, but he also had an energetic will and a firm hand. He maintained very strict discipline. Promptly and severely he squelched disorder. He was unyielding when, after careful examination and deliberation, he felt the need to punish a grave fault. Alumni of the old Assumption will undoubtedly remember the following examples:

First, the expulsion of L. de Gr... for serious disobedience. He was one of the best students in the school, beloved by teachers and fellow-students alike. His punishment was fair, but it terrified us and spread sadness throughout the college. Without exaggeration, everyone was in tears. Poor L. de Gr... had to remain in the school a few days prior to his departure. No one could speak to him: he was *incommunicado*.

Teachers and students took advantage of the delay; they signed a petition in his favor. They went to the chapel to pray, almost as if beseeching that a great disaster might cease. Fr. d'Alzon let himself be persuaded by the unanimous entreaties of his children. He forgave the boy who went back to his classmates, who cheered Fr. d'Alzon for his act of generosity which he never had reason to regret.

Second: the members of the school band had got into trouble. They were accused of serious lack of respect for a teacher, who was also Prefect of Discipline. Punishment was swift and crushing. The band was disbanded. The names of its members were inscribed in red ink (meaning a poor grade) on the roll in the public lounge. All the band members were deprived of their monthly outing. The details of this sad affair will be given in a later *sketch*.

Still, we loved this man who knew so well how to chastise us. We realized that he was right, even in matters that vexed us most. No other teacher had such an influence and hold upon his students.

Here are a few of the principles that I observed he followed as headmaster. Pope Leo XIII said that people could be governed in two ways, with a hand hidden in one's heart or with a heart hidden in one's hand. Vigor and strength giving an idea of sweetness to follow, or sweetness letting it be known that it had strength behind it. We could see Father's great heart; we felt, at the same time, that he had a vigorous hand behind the heart. He was the happy combination of the father of a family and the leader of an army. He insisted that authority be respected,

and never found fault with a teacher in the presence of a pupil.

He was very observant; he saw a lot himself and expected to be kept informed about everything. He wanted supervision to be dignified. He detested spying, which he said “turns children into sneaks.” Even at night, he supervised vigilantly. He used to walk the dormitories, lamp in hand, blessing the sleeping children.

He was very tactful. He soon saw that some students became demoralized and discouraged because some teachers, even with the best of intentions, were unable to understand a particular lad. His wise advice soon set things back in place.

The more senior students also had their nasty day. Forgetting for once their fine traditions, they had groused against an order from the Prefect of Discipline. Such mutiny by the senior students could possibly do serious harm to the younger students. It had to be put down, and it was. Fr. d’Alzon, in an unprecedented move, announced the general detention of all upper-classmen. It was an enormous punishment, although deserved. Father capped the detention by announcing that he would personally monitor it.

When the time came, Father mounted the monitor’s platform. He stood there, with severe mien and flashing eye. We shook in our boots, not daring to budge. We were afraid to make the tiniest noise with our pens as we wrote our *pensum* (punishment).

It was obvious — at least to all of us --- that Father wanted to have a showdown. He watched especially the students whose conduct was usually the best. The storm broke around the head of him who is now the bishop of Montpellier. He had turned toward the student on his right, me, as if to ask me a question. He didn’t even have time to open his mouth. What a choice victim! Father gave him a terrific scolding, biting and bitter, yet sarcastic and witty. It was, for Fr. d’Alzon, a triumph of eloquence. And it cleared the air. Finally we could breathe; the supercharged atmosphere ended.

He respected each child, treating each so as to inspire him with a sense of personal dignity. He had the knack of putting a poor stray back on the right path, helping him to better grades, with such kindness that the child thought that he was reforming himself by his own efforts. Isn’t that how divine grace operates, helping us mightily, but still leaving to

us the merit of sanctifying ourselves?

Even when Father found fault with us, he nonetheless left us with hope, like a balm, in our soul. Never did he discourage us. If he had to draw attention to our faults, he never forgot to mention our qualities, our good points, which could make our rehabilitation complete. He even kept the ill-disposed student afloat. With Fr. d'Alzon, no one was ever "done for," unless he absolutely wanted it. Fr. d'Alzon knew how to inspire in all a true and reasonable self-respect.

Very tactfully he fought against sentimental attachments between boys. On those occasions he would use his sense of ridicule, skillfully and with humor. He healed without offending.

More than once he reminded us of St. Bernard's advice that a superior must see and know everything. Then he must sometimes act as if he didn't know some things, while at other times he must act and let it be clearly known that he does know.

I have avoided speaking about the priest, confessor, and lecturer in order to concentrate exclusively on the headmaster.

SILK SOCKS

Viscountess d'Alzon took advantage of her son's visits home to replenish his wardrobe. He would arrive quite ragged because he gave away everything and never knew how to refuse. The paupers of Nîmes would punctually await his return from Lavagnac. They stayed outside his doorway on Marguerite Street, sure that they would get something.

One day Father returned with a suitcase full of fine clothes, all marked with his name. His mother had herself packed everything for her dear "beggar," and had included among other things a half-dozen pairs of black silk socks. As Fr. d'Alzon arrived, the beggars stretched out their hands. Father was penniless, but he did have something. He opened his suitcase and gave away everything in it. All the socks went; only the empty suitcase remained. Some friends, notified soon enough, managed to retrieve some of the clothes and return them to Fr. d'Alzon who needed them more than did many of the paupers.

It is said that near the Maison Carrée one could see a beggar in rags who had on his feet fine silk socks of which he was very proud and wouldn't give up for any price. He showed them off and told everyone

where they came from.

Thus the poor wore new clothes while Fr. d'Alzon was content to wear old mended garments. He was called extravagant and foolish, but such fools are wonderfully wise!

LOYAL AND PROUD

Once upon a time in Nîmes, there was a very rich man who suddenly inherited a vast fortune. People said his cellars were crammed with gold. This man built himself a palace, became powerful among his fellow citizens, and was richer than they by millions. He was neither evil nor ungrateful. He was kind-hearted and, to a certain extent, ambitious. He wanted to be first in influence, as he was in wealth. But the preeminent position was already occupied by Fr. d'Alzon.

The rich man, who admired and respected Fr. d'Alzon and envied his social position, wanted to become Father's friend. He was ready to help many of the Assumptionists' works; financially he was in a position to do so easily. Yet Fr. d'Alzon did not hesitate to break with this man. He set him aside, far distant, as soon as he learned that the man did not follow the real Catholic line and was not absolutely devoted to the Pope.

At the time Fr. d'Alzon was without funds. He had ruined himself financially by donating to apostolic works and charity. He would have preferred to live on bread and water or go begging from door to door rather than compromise on principles and fraternize with anyone, rich or powerful, who could help him in his difficulties, but who was not totally and sincerely Catholic, and put Caesar above the Pope.

The example is not unique in the heroic life of Fr. d'Alzon. His was a noble soul. May his sons be like him. Here we find the real chivalrous spirit of Fr. d'Alzon, "this priest with the proud, independent, fearless soul and a *great priestly manner*."²

AN HONOR REFUSED

It is highly probable that when Fr. d'Alzon destroyed all his correspondence he burned a letter from the martyred Archbishop Affre of Paris. Among the notes I took in college I find a detail worth

² Cardinal de Cabrières, "Speech for a Golden Anniversary." The italicized words are from Lacordaire.

including here. Unfortunately I do not have the date of the letter, but my notes are from 1848, after the death of the archbishop. It must have been about that time that Fr. d'Alzon showed me a letter of which the following is an extract:

“Dear Father d’Alzon,

I call upon your love for the Church and your devotion to what is right in order to ask you to accept the post of Vicar-General of Paris. I would be happy to have you by my side; you would help me bear the heavy burden of the episcopate. You know Paris, where you studied. Your father is still fondly remembered here. Your reputation, your talents, and your influence would guarantee a successful ministry, especially among a certain class and among youth. I offer you a vast field of endeavor; it is not too great for the energy of your zeal...”

Father did not accept; he preferred to stay at Nîmes. He lived without ambition; he sought to remain humble although he had every opportunity to advance and be “seated on the throne of an illustrious church,” as Bishop Besson so well said. He created bishops; he placed the golden mitre on more than one head, but his own head remained covered only by the monastic cowl. True, but his head is surrounded by rays of immortality.

FIDELITY TO PRINCIPLE

Our illustrious Father remained faithful to his political principles; he was inflexible in his religious principles, from which sprang his action. In the opinion of those who knew him, there is not the shadow of a doubt that he would have accepted and followed the political line drawn by Leo XIII. Not only would he have accepted it, but he would have felt it his duty to defend, explain, and support the thought of the Sovereign Pontiff. His devotion to the Holy See was not halfhearted nor made with reservations.

His obedience to the Pope was as unlimited as was his respect for the Apostolic See. Here are two examples. In Rome he had known Fr. Ventura well, and was much beloved by him. But the day came when the famous Theatine, having opposed Pius IX in some political matters, was obliged to leave Rome. He came to France and notified Fr. d’Alzon that he would visit Nîmes and Assumption College. Father had

everything prepared to receive him, but himself left for Lavagnac, in order not to be host to a priest who had opposed the Pope, even in matters that had nothing to do with religious doctrine.

One of his pupils, pastor of a parish in the Hérault,³ once appealed to the Holy See because of difficulties he was having. He went to Rome where he ran into obstacles from Cardinal Antonelli, the Papal Secretary of State. Astonished at having to struggle against diplomacy, in matters that he deemed purely ecclesiastical, the young priest complained strongly to the Cardinal. He also wrote to Fr. d'Alzon a long letter on the subject. Believing himself unfairly treated, he energetically and quite immoderately decried the Secretary of State's action. Fr. d'Alzon sent a stern reply which contained the following passage: "I don't agree with the distinction you make between the religious domain and the political domain. Personally, I stand squarely for the absolute respect we owe the Pope. Cardinal Antonelli is the Pope's minister. That's all I see. If you pretend to deal, equal to equal, with the Pope's minister, I would say that you are, mellowing my term, impertinent. I am letting you know that if you persist in this direction, I shall move away from you and abandon your cause."

This is the real Fr. d'Alzon. He was often accused of inconstancy. True, his confidence in people, even his closest friends, sometimes varied, depending on how they followed, or strayed away from, principles which he believed unchanging. He lived and died in absolute fidelity to the Church and to the Pope, without reservations, never forgetting that he was one of Peter's sheep; a disciple, not a master; a son who obeys his father's slightest command. This Catholic spirit, he bequeathed to his sons. On this point especially we are faithful to our Father and master.

THE STORY OF A RING

Bishop Cart had a precious episcopal ring. Its main jewel was a ruby that had once been on the chasuble of St. Thomas of Canterbury, preserved at Sens. The ruby was surrounded by a circlet of flowers and stars in pearls and turquoises, on a golden ring. Around the exterior of the ring were engraved the following words in French: *From the*

³ Galeran himself.

chasuble of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

Bishop Cart willed the ring, as well as a pectoral cross and rosary, “to his dear vicar-general.” Fr. d’Alzon, always generous, gave two of the objects to convents. He gave the ring to Fr. de Cabrières who, no less generous than his Father, presented it to the Dames de Besançon. Somehow it entered the possession of their chaplain. At his death, Fr. de Cabrières reclaimed it, at the urging of a student who believed that the ring, as a memento of St. Thomas a Becket, should be offered to the Archbishop of Westminster. Fr. d’Alzon concurred.

The relic was therefore passed to Fr. Pi card who had to go to London for some meetings with the Religious of the Assumption, and he turned it over to Cardinal Manning. The ring is now kept in the chapel of the archbishop of Westminster, along with other relics of St. Thomas and the martyr’s mitre, also from Sens.

A SOCIAL QUESTION

Fr. d’Alzon based his social studies on Sacred Scripture. Just as Bossuet had done in his *Politique tirée de l’Ecriture Sainte*, he liked to seek in the inspired books the fundamental principles upon which the social order must be based. I have only simple notes on some of his explanations. But it is easy to summarize his views, for instance, on the parable of the vineyard laborers, in chapter XX of St. Matthew. Here is his method of interpretation:

“In this parable we find the following elements: employers and workers, work, hours of work, salary and contract. The workers’ rights are clearly defined, as well as those of the owner who offers a just wage while reserving to himself the right to go beyond strict justice in certain circumstances.

“At dawn, the employer goes to the market place where men waited to be hired. Naturally he chose the strongest laborers, and contracted to pay them a penny, a reasonable daily wage then. The vineyard workers agreed to the conditions and left for the vineyard.

“Maybe additional workers were needed; so the employer returned to the market place about nine o’clock. He picked his men, but because the hour was advanced, he made no contract, fixed no wage. He simply said he’d pay what was just. Again at noon and at three o’clock he hired

others, never stipulating wages. Around five o'clock, he saw some workers still waiting to be hired. He was moved by their plight. 'What are you waiting for, doing nothing here?' 'No one hired us; we can't find work.'

"Obviously the best workers had already been hired. Those of the eleventh hour were weak men, elderly, poorly equipped. Still, they too needed food for themselves and their families. The good master sends them to his vineyard, promising to be just.

"Working hours stretched from dawn until six in the evening, the twelfth hour, including meal time and the time needed to go to and from the vineyard. Evening comes; the foreman starts to pay the workers, giving to all the same wages, according to the owner's instructions. He starts by the last hired, as he had been ordered to do.

"We find here a very delicate and respectful way of dealing with the poor, the weak, the forsaken who, despite themselves, were able to work only a tiny bit. Here is a Christian justice far richer than that of the Pharisees. Strict justice gives to each only what is due. But when justice is elevated to perfection, like that of God, by a blend of mercy and charity, then the employer becomes the friend of the unemployed. The first are paid for their labor according to a prior wage agreement.

"The last, having trusted in the generosity of a noble heart, were paid for work they never did, because they were hired so late in the day, even though they too had been in the market place seeking employment.

"Note this well: those hired at 9, at 12, at 3 are not jealous and they do not complain about the way in which the last hired were treated. The first-hired murmur unjustly, not because they are underpaid but because the others seem to be overpaid. As if they controlled the wealth of the capitalist owner!

"They do not see that their poor comrades have neither strength nor skill but that their families must nevertheless live and that it is a good thing that Christian generosity re-establish a balance. They do not see because their outlook is bad. These socialists clamor for equality but complain against the one who really reestablishes equality. They don't see things like the vineyard owner, who very appropriately tells their spokesman, 'My friend, I'm not unjust toward you. Take what is yours. Is your eye evil because mine is good? Don't I have the right to do what

I want with my own money. If I had doubled your wages and had paid the last-hired for only one hour's work, would you have murmured and complained for them?"

Employers and workers would do well to know the Gospel. Many social questions, which defy solution at the hands of the greatest statesmen, would be clarified and easily resolved if only the Gospel were well known and meditated. Economists have fine theories; they write books and draw up statistics. But nothing is done; the problems remain. We seek light everywhere except where God put it. St. Matthew could teach a lot to our leaders, if only they would read him.

The social problems of workers was not the main problem when Fr. d'Alzon explained the gospel in this way. But it is interesting to note the insight with which he penetrated the popular movement. This commentary, a conversation, I noted in my journal in May, 1847.

BISHOP PLANTIER

In a masterly speech delivered in front of the statue of Fr. d'Alzon in Nîmes, Bishop de Cabrières said, "Bishop Plantier and Fr. d'Alzon remained each in his own field. They understood each other so well that some have thought that the Bishop of Nîmes' zeal for Roman causes was almost imposed upon him by the domineering vicar-general." Fr. d'Alzon may have been domineering, but so was Bishop Plantier. Less than anyone else was he inclined to have something "almost imposed" upon him by anyone, even his vicar-general. Undoubtedly Fr. d'Alzon strongly influenced his bishop, but it was by prayer, example, or a word spoken at precisely the right moment. To this he added an admirable patience in time of trial. Nothing was ever unbecoming in his action because his respect for his superior was as profound as sincere.

I might cite some examples that might shed some light on the subject. A few days after the death of Mrs. d'Alzon, Father came to Montpellier to attend a Mass in the church of St. Roch, celebrated by Fr. Recluz, the pastor. I remember Father's displeasure when the priest came out wearing a yellow chasuble when the rubrics allowed black vestments. After the Mass, in the house where Mrs. d'Alzon had died, Fr. d'Alzon, Fr. Barnouin, and I were in the salon. Fr. d'Alzon said, "Do you know that Bp. Plantier told me, 'Now that your father is left alone, I suppose

that you will no longer remain vicar-general?’ I replied to this somewhat harsh statement, ‘Excellency, I didn’t become a priest for my father, and it was not for him that you made me vicar-general. I shall therefore continue to serve the Church at the post which my bishop has entrusted to me, if he allows.’” At that moment, Mme de Puységur entered the salon and the conversation took another direction. But since that day the relations between bishop and vicar-general became more affectionate, and the mutual affection lasted a lifetime.

Fr. d’Alzon himself told me about the following episode: One day he was alone with Pius IX — at Castel Gandolfo, I believe -and he saw on the Pope’s desk a photograph of Bp. Pie, of Poitiers. In his breviary he had a picture of Bp. Plantier which he showed to the Pope, asking him to accept it and place it near Bp. Pie’s photo. Smiling, the Pope said, “But he is a Gallican.”

“True, but it will do him a world of good to be in such company, under your watchful eye.”

The Pope took the picture and placed it near Bp. Pie’s photo. “Now, Holy Father,” said Fr. d’Alzon, “please give me some kind words that I might bring back to my bishop.”

“Ah,” said Pius IX, “can I compliment his Gallicanism? Well, tell him for me that I bless him and admire the eloquence of his writings in defense of the Church.”

When Bp. Plantier heard what the Pope had said and what he’d done with his picture, he was profoundly touched. These are the methods used by Fr. d’Alzon to attract a famous prelate away from Gallicanism and to give the Holy See a brave defender who worked ceaselessly and wholeheartedly for the ultramontane cause, as we all know. The bishop explained the reason for his change of heart in a splendid letter sent to Bp. Maret.

I have tried here, as in all these sketches, to quote Fr. d’Alzon verbatim. My memory is faithful; yet I always use notes which I jotted down at the time the events happened or when I was told of them. The bishop of Montpellier also noted his impressions and souvenirs in a journal. Some day, His Excellency will share these treasures with the Assumptionists, his brothers and mine. May that day come soon, because “It is nearly evening and the day is almost over” (Lk 24:29).

ALMONDS

Fr. d'Alzon seemed totally indifferent to food. He was as sober and frugal as a hermit, ate rapidly, too rapidly for his health, for he regularly suffered from stomach cramps. Nonetheless, he was very fond of a special type of soft-shelled almonds, called "ladies almonds" in Southern France, which grew abundantly at le Vigan and Lavagnac. Quite often people searching for young Emmanuel in the park found him perched in an almond tree, gnawing at almonds like a squirrel. An old servant at le Vigan recalled how it was easy to tell which trees Emmanuel had climbed, by the piles of empty almond shells strewn over the ground. It seems that Fr. d'Alzon never lost his weakness for almonds. It was an innocent weakness but he later used it to mortify himself, as I know from personal experience. Just one example:

One day, while I was chaplain at Montpellier, I met Father in Canourgue Square. He was coming from a visit to Fr. Barre and was going toward the cathedral, at nine A.M. "Father," I said, "if you are free would you come to lunch with me?" "My dear son," he replied, "I'd be afraid to keep you waiting, because I have quite a few visits to make."

"I'll wait for you. At what time?"

"Around one o'clock. I shall refuse all other invitations. Still, it might be better if, this time, I..." He was hesitating. In order to help him decide, I said, "I just received from Gignac a supply of delicious almonds, a whole basketful. You know?"

"In that case, expect me at 12:30."

I had won and at 12:30 we sat down to table. The various courses came and went and finally the almonds were placed in the center of the table. I glanced toward Father who never reached out to take even one almond. We were just the two of us and Fr. d'Alzon said to me quite simply, "My son, let me be. I shall not touch these almonds, that I am crazy about, as you know. When you invited me, I gave in to a bit of gluttony, as I have quite often in my lifetime. Now it's time to put an end to such whims. We end up by becoming their slaves. Let's be their masters!" Then, laughing heartily, he said, "Bring on the coffee, and don't forget the cognac."

He was fearful of having given me too high an opinion of his spirit of mortification. Neither the coffee nor the cognac made me forget the

honest and delicate lesson in self-denial which Father had just given me. Forty years later, I still remember it. As you can see, such details are somewhat confidential. But they are most interesting for precisely this reason. Inevitably I always seem to be injecting myself upon the scene, try though I may to do otherwise. Even this is no reason to hide the admirable little deeds which bring us directly to the heart of our beloved Father.

ADMIRABLE SIMPLICITY

Fr. d'Alzon was born to command; his natural place was as leader. He was ardent, captivating, naturally domineering and peremptory. By nature he tended to be brusque, even curt, whenever he was contradicted. By effort he had arrived at perfect self-control, although now and then there were impetuous outbursts, which he immediately controlled. His childlike simplicity, surprising in such a man, was shown in hundreds of ways. I shall give only two examples.

Father had written a long memorandum against a certain prelate whom it is unnecessary to identify here. It was a crushing denunciation which he intended to send to Rome. He had loyally resolved to send a copy to the prelate beforehand. Father was very proud of his work, written because of his complete devotion to the Pope, in order to put an end to a very bad influence.

He was just about to send it off when three visitors dropped in, two Dominicans and Fr. G..., a former pupil. "You come in the nick of time," Father said. "I want you to read a memo that I'm about to send to Bishop X." He read it to us. It was a terrible indictment and was written in very sharp language. At the end, one of the Dominicans said, "I am of the opinion that this document, as it now stands, would do more harm than good. Instead of being so provocative, would it not be better to try more moderate language? What you say is true and not exaggerated, but expressed too sharply. Maybe you wrote it in a moment of personal pique after having been unjustly treated by this prelate, as you obviously were."

"You're right," answered Fr. d'Alzon, "I thank you. Your advice is wise." Rather than post the memo, he tore it into tiny pieces and threw them in the waste basket.

On another occasion, Father had come to Montpellier expressly to reproach a very talented young priest — later a distinguished prelate — for his actions and words in certain matters concerning the Holy See. The young priest, momentarily dazzled by promises or led astray by treacherous advice, had sided with the partisans of Caesar. He had even publicly found fault with the clergy of Nîmes that had “fallen under the spell of Fr. d’Alzon’s enthusiasm” concerning the Roman question.

As soon as he arrived in Montpellier, Fr. d’Alzon went to the residence of a former pupil, to rest for a while. He explained why he was in Montpellier. “Father,” said the former student, “don’t do that. In the present troubled state of affairs, your visit to Fr. X would do more harm than good.”

Father let himself be persuaded, but good-naturedly said, “I have come from Nîmes especially to prove to Fr. X how unseemly is his attitude toward the Pope. Must I return to Nîmes without saying anything at all?”

“Yes, Father, at least for now.”

“Well, come along to the station with me. We can chat while I wait for the next train back to Nîmes.”

The Book of Proverbs says, XX:7, “A virtuous man whose ways are blameless — happy his children after him!” A panegyrist for Fr. d’Alzon might not choose this text. But those who knew him intimately know that he dealt open-heartedly with God and men, with simplicity. That’s why his undertakings were successful. In the things of God, multiplicity is proportionate to simplicity.

THREE MEN, THREE PRIESTS, THREE SAINTS

Among the many graces that God has given me, I consider one of the greatest to have been my relations with three remarkable men: Jean-Marie Vianney, *Curé d’Ars*, Don John Bosco, and Father Emmanuel d’Alzon. All three priests labored, each in his own way, for the Church of Jesus Christ. They never tried to meet on this earth. Each worked valiantly in his field of apostolate and then fell in the furrows in the Lord’s good time, and they are now gathered in His eternal rest.

The *Curé d’Ars*, a model of humility, never left his modest parish. Don Bosco, an example of gentleness, spent his life among children. Fr.

d'Alzon, always bold in the cause of righteousness, dared everything, tried everything. He launched his warrior-sons in the West and toward the East.

Crowds streamed into Ars to gather round humble Jean Vianney. Don Bosco traveled through cities and the countryside to gather and save children. Emmanuel d'Alzon, with incredible strength and activity, lavished his love upon colleges, alummates, and foreign missions.

These men left behind them deep, indelible traces. No doubt, they are not the only nineteenth century men whose names will shine gloriously from generation to generation. I wanted to bring together these three men whom I knew so well, in order to compare them. I must conclude that all three, different though they may be, bear striking features of what it takes to be a man, a priest, a saint.

NOBLE AND GENEROUS HEART

A former pupil of Fr. d'Alzon became a missionary in a foreign, but not pagan, land. He once acted in a way that greatly displeased and saddened Fr. d'Alzon. It was not the first time he had acted thus.

A short while later, the missionary had to go to Nîmes. He wrote to Fr. de Cabrières, his comrade and friend, announcing the date and time of his arrival. He didn't know how angry Fr. d'Alzon was with him. He didn't even suspect it.

Coming out of the railroad station he met de Cabrières who told him, "Listen, I've come to warn you. Fr. d'Alzon is angry at you. This time you have seriously offended him. He said he'd speak severely to you the first time he saw you. He knows you're coming, so be ready for a cool reception. Accept the humiliation and everything will turn out all right."

It was very unpleasant to hear this after a long trip, especially when he had been so glad to return to Assumption. There was no way to escape the gathering storm, except by avoiding the college altogether, and that would only have made things worse. He had to summon all his courage, as he approached the judge whom he loved yet feared. They crossed Feuchères Avenue, Pradier and La Servie streets, and arrived at the entrance to the College. The door was opened as soon as they had rung the bell. Fr. d'Alzon was standing in the main courtyard, with Frs. Bailly and Pernet nearby.

Although the parallel was not exact, the poor traveler thought of the parable of the Prodigal Son as he advanced, trying to seem at ease. As soon as he saw the traveler, Fr. d'Alzon ran toward him, arms opened wide. "My son, here you are. How pleased I am to see you again." Fr. d'Alzon embraced him tenderly, Fr. de Cabrières was stupefied, disappointed, and speechless at this warm reception. Then, deeply moved himself, he smiled and said to Fr. d'Alzon, "Father...shame on you! After all you've said, you greet him in this way. After all you've reproached him with!"

"What can I say?" said Fr. d'Alzon. "I had carefully prepared myself...but as soon as I saw him, everything crumbled. I couldn't resist. My heart won. Are you going to hold that against me?" Fr. de Cabrières never held it against him. Nor did he who tells you about this fine scene. The Assumptionists, for whom this is written, will not hold it against their Father. They will admire and approve. Of this I'm sure.

A CHRISTMAS NIGHT

I find in my Journal the summary, rather than the text, of a sermon. It must have been in 1850, in the actual chapel of Assumption, at the first Midnight Mass celebrated in the dear sanctuary. It was during my first year at college. At communion time, after the *Domine, non sum dignus*, Fr. d'Alzon held the host above the ciborium and, apparently carried away by love and faith, uttered these words:

"My dear children, here he is, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, son of the Virgin Mary. Here present, under the appearance of bread, is his body, containing his blood, his soul, his divinity. His divine look rests upon us. His sacred heart beats with love for us. Say to him, 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy upon us.' Do you hear his answer in the depths of your souls, 'What do you want? What can I do for you?'"

"Let us cry out: Lord, we don't ask that you love us. That you do already. You proved it by shedding your precious blood. You will prove it again by giving yourself to us in communion. But Lord, Master, Friend, give us the grace to love you. Expand our hearts that they may be filled with you. Be the beginning, the continuation, and the end of everything in us.

"My children, what an ineffable mystery we contemplate. In a

moment, the Word Incarnate, the priest who offers the Sacrifice, and you who will receive communion, will become one. The life of Christ, Son of God, will become our life, his breathing will become our breath, his heart-beats will regulate our heart-beats! Come, draw near, become one with your God. During your thanksgiving repeat the prayer from the liturgy of the Mass. ‘Do not allow me ever to be separated from you.’”

Who can convey Father’s attitude or communicate the penetrating quality of his voice! As I turn the pages of my Journal, I realize that I noted more sermons, lectures and exhortations by Father than I thought. They are a sealed book, and I have never broken the seal. It seems impossible to publish them as sketches. Some day, God willing, I may publish them as a separate volume. I noted only what I had heard personally.

FOREBODING

In a short undated note, Fr. d’Alzon once wrote to me: “My dear friend, tell Archbishop Manning that I thought I should resign as vicar-general, and I have done so. I shall consecrate myself wholly to my congregation. I feel that I shall have to defend the religious congregations in Rome against the tendency of certain bishops who fear what they call encroachments and would want them to be suppressed or gathered together under a common rule.

“Believe me, if God wants different congregations to exist, he will know how, by unforeseen circumstances which he controls, to bring the bishops themselves to defend courageously, against future enemies, the very congregations that they now seem anxious to get rid of. God leads the Church...”

These words, written before the laws which expelled the religious (from France), are remarkable. Events have proven them to be true.

THE ASSUMPTION BAND

I return now to an event already mentioned, in order to throw into relief the wisdom and firmness of Fr. d’Alzon. His heart was of the best: loving, great, and generous. However, he was severe and even terrifying whenever it was a question of discipline violation, lack of respect for a teacher, or especially a fault against honor. Here’s an example:

The old Assumption College had a military band made up of older students. Let's not forget to mention that the best of all the musicians was Fr. Charles Laurent, whose favorite instrument was the ophicleide (a tuba-like instrument). From it he blew sounds like a lion's roar, gifted as he was with strong lungs and powerful lips. He even took part in parades, hiding his cassock and clerical hat among the tubas. Still some of the urchins would cry out, "Hey, there's a priest in the middle there!"

One ill-fated day, the members of the band — Father Laurent was not among them obviously — were accused of improper and even insulting conduct toward a teacher. It is useless to be more specific. I must say, however, that the accused had no evil intent, although appearances did seem against them. This happened in 1849, and now, in 1894, I declare that we were not guilty. Still, it was hard, even impossible, to justify ourselves, and we had to bow our heads beneath the impending storm.

Fr. d'Alzon, after a crushingly severe speech, disbanded the group, ordered that they be given failing conduct grades, and deprived them of the usual monthly outing. We were not guilty; we were the victims of a judicial error, but the punishment was complete. We felt bad at the thought of having offended Fr. d'Alzon. Everything else was negligible; but that thought alone was unbearable.

We resolved to see Fr. d'Alzon, we declared that the punishment was readily accepted, and we asked him to look kindly upon those who begged his forgiveness for having offended him despite themselves. This "despite" caused everything to crumble.

The student spokesman, H.D.G. (Galeran) imprudently injected this "despite" in his speech, and the day was lost.

The delegation had found Fr. d'Alzon seated in the faculty library. He didn't get up, but sat up straight, eyes flashing. These were the warnings of a horrible storm. Seeing this, the spokesman became flustered, stuttered, and finally blurted his "despite themselves." The result was immediate.

"Despite yourselves," interrupted Fr. d'Alzon. "You dare say 'despite yourselves'? See these innocents who strike a blow and then pretend that all they wanted to do was to caress! Gentlemen, your conduct has been a disgrace; you have lacked respect, charity, honor. In the poorly prepared speech that I have just heard, there are almost as many inexact

expressions as there have been false notes in your music. It is not by phrases, especially poorly prepared ones, that you can atone. It is by an exemplary conduct from now on. Now get out.”

Each word struck like a dart. What a rout! We left humiliated.

Father d’Alzon ended by making us forget his severity, by giving signs of delicate affection. He remained convinced of our guilt until 1859. Then, in Montpellier, dining with the erstwhile spokesman of the band, now a priest, he listened to a clear and calm explanation. He accepted the evidence and said, “Why didn’t you tell me all this at the time? What did you ever mean by your ‘despite themselves’¹? Well, better late than never.”

STORY OF A JUG

Fr. d’Alzon himself told me about the following:

At Lavagnac, near the farm, was an old stable that had been repaired, whitewashed, and furnished with straw, in order to serve as an overnight shelter for poor beggars. Out of curiosity, and without being noticed, Father once watched the poor people as they were being served supper. The men had found a jug in the hay, probably forgotten there by some previous traveler. The fellow who had seen it first claimed it; the fellow who had seized it also claimed it. An argument began, and they soon came to blows. Then the oldest of the group declared that the jug, having been found in a common room, really belonged to everyone and that they had to share it. But how does one share a jug? The jug was placed in the middle of the group and smashed to pieces. Each could claim his share. Concord reigned.

Said Fr. d’Alzon, “Here is a rule for society, that gives food for thought. It is reminiscent of “The Oyster and the Litigants” (a fable by La Fontaine).

DARING NAVIGATOR

While I was preaching a Lenten sermon at Sommières, in the Nîmes diocese, Canon Redier, former secretary-general for the diocese, showed me a letter by Bishop Cart, datelined Toulouse, in which we find the following: “Fr. d’Alzon has just written to me from Lavagnac. He says that he is bored with inactivity and is going to return to Nîmes to

undertake certain projects which he has mulled over while he was resting. My dear friend, let us pray to the Lord! He'll come back with some new foundation. He'll jump into it with his usual enthusiasm. For a long time we shall have no rest. He'll shake up everything."

Bp. de Cabrières, in his Golden Jubilee speech at Assumption, clearly delineated the character of both the bishop and his vicar-general, and I quote here a remarkable passage: "Bishop Cart acquired by effort some habits of meekness and moderation which contrasted with the impetuosity and even temerity of his young vicar-general. Both sought the good but did not always seek to obtain it by the same means. Sometimes, like a high-strung race-horse wanting to chew up space, frothing under its rider's hand, Fr. d'Alzon complained against the reins, however light and loose they might be, by which the bishop tried to hold him in check and keep him calm."

The expressions are admirable. Bp. de Cabrières resembles Bp. Cart a great deal. According to Fr. Edmond's fine phrase, he is "the very sweet son of Emmanuel." Still, Fr. d'Alzon's ardor was not frothing, nor rash, nor thoughtless. Whether the reins were loose and flopping or not, Father chewed up space anyhow, but only when he saw good to do and an objective to attain which assured this good.

Bishop Cart had the meekness of a Francis de Sales; he was often too timid. Thank God his vicar-general had fire and daring! Well-meaning but diffident friends could neither moderate his élan nor dampen his ardor. Had he followed the advice of some good, devoted, yet fearful men, we would not have the Assumptionists, or the Oblates, or the Little Sisters, or the alummates, or many other undertakings whose beginnings were called rash and even foolish. Father had launched his boat on waters tossed by cross-currents. He had not done so without meditating seriously, without consulting the will of God, the star that guided all his ventures. Once convinced that he had to sail ahead, he bravely bounded over the waves, keeping the bow headed toward the desired destination. He stopped only when the look-out cried, "Land, land," and he felt that he had reached shore.

PRODIGAL SON

Fr. de Chaire, from the diocese of Mende, once came to spend a

few days with his friend, Fr. d'Alzon, and was asked to preach to the students one Saturday evening, after the Litanies. He chose to speak about the parable of the Prodigal Son. He treated the subject admirably, in a very simple style and with a lot of heart. The Gospel account seemed presented as modern drama. The characters were the same; but as he made them act and speak, the preacher seemed to have in mind some people he knew. The departure, the sojourn, and the return were according to St. Luke's account but there were details which brought the action closer to the nineteenth century.

The sermon was very interesting and the students spoke about it for days. Fr. d'Alzon had heard it from the organ loft. The following Saturday, the roles were reversed, with Fr. de Chaire in the organ loft and Fr. d'Alzon doing the preaching. The pupils guessed that he would allude to the Prodigal Son sermon. They were right.

"Last Saturday," said Fr. d'Alzon, "you heard a sermon which greatly interested everyone. After a whole week you do not seem to have discovered the key to certain allusions which intrigued you. Fr. de Chaire is in the loft, where I was during his sermon. I ask his permission to give you the key.

"The Prodigal Son, whom he so well depicted, left the paternal home without asking for his share of the inheritance. His mother was still alive, and his father was not the kind of man who divides up his wealth ahead of time. The prodigal obtained a round little sum from his mother and a couple of aunts. He left for a distant land, morally speaking, because he got no further than Paris. For him there was to be no farm, no hogs, no acorns. The young man was far away, far from God and from his faith. His father and mother prayed for him and asked others to pray too.

"One day, almost by accident, he entered a church. Something seized him and he was completely turned around. (Like the Prodigal Son), he rose; and he put everything back in order. He entered a confessional and with a strong arm washed all his dirty linen. He came out clean, fresh, presentable in God's view and in his own.

"He returned to his father, and everyone's joy was complete. No one killed the fatted calf, because, so I'm told, that day happened to be a Friday. He didn't need fine new clothes because his soul was spotless,

following repentance and absolution. His body needed neither silks nor embroideries because he announced that he was going to don the cassock, which he quickly did. For shoes, he chose buckled ones. For a ring... someone tried to foist a bishop's ring upon him, but he obstinately refused it. This summarizes the sermon. For the key, look up now at that fine priest, Fr. de Chaire. He is the Prodigal Son, whose portrait he drew so masterfully for you."

THE EAGLE EYE

Fr. d'Alzon had very beautiful eyes: dark brown, almost black, small without being disproportionate, slightly sunken. It is said that Leo XIII has a penetrating gaze: when one speaks to him, he seems to stare to the very bottom of your soul; when he speaks to you, he fascinates you and holds you in an almost irresistible spell. Without exaggeration, the same could be said about Fr. d'Alzon. When he preached, especially as he became excited, one could see lightning flash. People whom he reproached felt pierced by the intensity of his gaze. Even in conversation, he seemed to guess at all the ramifications of your thought. Consequently he had a powerful influence upon souls and upon hearts. Beneath his fiery eye, you felt subjugated, conquered, reduced to absolute weakness.

The gospel speaks of the power of the master's gaze. When Simon was presented to him, Jesus looked hard at him before speaking (Jn 1:42). When someone asked sincerely what he had to do to obtain eternal life, the Master "looked steadily at him and loved him" (Mk 10:21). The fall of Peter reminds us of Jesus' gaze, rapid yet so forceful that the soul of the guilty apostle was transpierced (Lk 22:61-2).

What artist of genius and especially of great faith will ever be able to paint for us the head of Jesus with the real expression of those divine eyes, in the scenes I have just recalled?

Saints have been gifted with amazing vision. Those who have seen the Curé d'Ars or John Bosco close-up will never forget the penetrating gaze of the former or the touching kindness in the gaze of the founder of the Salesians...Fr. d'Alzon's gaze was profound and expressive and at times seemed to throw out sparks. It sometimes pierced like a sword. He had a magnetic force which drew your soul toward him. His influence

was so powerful that his soul seemed to enter your own. His ordinary expression combined the forces of a superior mind with those of a loving heart.

FORBIDDEN BOOKS

Fr. d'Alzon's outlook on life was very broad, but, strangely enough, he was very severe, even strict and scrupulous, in his choice of readings.

He used to make me report in detail on all my readings, and reserved to himself the right to furnish me with books. During the vacations, he once passed me a volume from a fine collection of Bourdaloue and then obliged me to give an oral report on the sermons that struck me most. Bit by bit he made me read the complete works of the famous preacher.

I was still a student when he surprised me in my rooms at Montpellier one day. He noticed Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs* on my desk.

"What are you doing with that book?"

"I'm going to read it."

"Who gave you permission?"

"Fr. O...,the parish curate, lent it to me."

"Do you have some twine here?"

"Here's some."

Father then tied together a number of pages and said, "Go ahead and read, but skip the part I've indicated." It was the section dealing with Velléda.

"Father, you're tempting me a lot. Interest in the story, curiosity, and a little devil tempting me might make me cut your twine. I'd rather give the book back unread."

"That's exactly the point I was trying to make, my dear friend. Return the book. This young priest should not have passed it to you, and you may tell him so for me."

Once I had become a priest, curate or chaplain, Fr. d'Alzon examined my library each time he came to visit me. One day he discovered a complete breviary, with a superb soft leather binding, which I had just obtained from Paris. It struck his fancy and he wanted to have it. In exchange he offered a wretched volume. It was poorly bound, heavy and thick; and some nun had covered it with black velvet, with snaps on it!

He left me this monstrosity and smilingly departed with my masterpiece of binding. Shortly after, I saw it in Nîmes in the hands of Fr. B..., who had known the trick of getting it for himself. All this is now long past. I never held it against anyone, least of all against Fr. d'Alzon.

I must confess that when I told the famous pastor of St. Denis in Montpellier, Fr. Martin d'Agie, about my breviary, he begged me to give him the breviary which Fr. d'Alzon had left in exchange. "I shall put it in a place of honor in my library. A breviary used by Fr. d'Alzon is a relic." So I gave Fr. Martin the book.

LET'S BE THRIFTY

Every once in awhile, Father was suddenly carried away by attacks of thrift. But these crises were very short. For example:

When he came to Montpellier to become a candidate for the General Council, he stopped at the Nevet hotel, right smack in the middle of the meetings of his opponents. He asked me to come and see him, and when I arrived he asked me to do him a favor. "My eyesight is failing. I notice it especially when I'm writing. Would you go out and buy me some eyeglasses?"

I explained the condition of his eyes to an optician and bought the finest lenses in the best frames. When he tried them on, Father seemed perfectly satisfied.

"How much did you pay for them?" "As well as I can remember, I think the price was 20 or 25 francs." "You poor wretch! 20 francs for some glasses for me! Exchange them immediately for something cheaper."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. The lenses are top quality and the frames are tortoise-shell — just what you need."

He finally agreed to keep the glasses when I proved to him somehow that it was not against religious poverty: there wasn't even the tiniest screw made of gold, it was just ordinary silver, etc...

A few days later, Father was dining with me. I told him that a good fellow who had once been a farm-hand at Lavagnac wanted to see him to ask a favor.

"Father," I said, "give him five francs. That's all he expects."

“Five francs? I’ll give him one! I have to be thrifty. I can’t go beyond that.”

After dinner, the man arrived and I left him alone with Fr. d’Alzon who received him graciously, as always. When the man was leaving, I said to him, “I’m sure he gave you something. It may not be as much as you expected, because right now he has quite large expenses.” The man smiled and opened his fist. There, shining and sparkling, was a gold twenty franc piece.

Father knew how to invest in a bank that knows neither bankruptcy nor revolutions. In heaven he has now found both capital and accrued interest, along with the blessing of everyone who ever benefited from his liberality.

ADORING ANGELS

I dare insert here the following story, which must be understood with a sense of humor. In a church of the Nîmes diocese, there were, and probably still are, two adoring angels flanking the tabernacle. The right-hand one was kneeling, hands joined, head tilted toward the right, looking upward. The left angel was also kneeling, bent over, looking down, and seemed to let his arms droop.

The pastor one day asked Fr. d’Alzon what the different postures might mean. “It’s simple,” said Fr. d’Alzon, “the right angel looks up and shakes his joined hands, exclaiming ‘My God, our pastor is dumb!’ The left angel bows down, hands dropped in despair and resignation and says, ‘I really can’t do anything about that!’”

I ask the readers to laugh as heartily as did Fr. d’Alzon and the pastor, two good friends who loved each other so much that they could afford to joke in this fashion.

GOD ALONE

When I heard from Fr. de Cabrières about the death of Mme de Puységur (Fr. d’Alzon’s sister), I wrote to Father and he answered:

“My dear friend, your letter did me a lot of good. You are right, we must remain united in our joys, and especially in our sorrows, we who are priests and have the consolation of approaching the altar to pray for the living and the dead.

“May God grant me as holy a death as that of my dear ones whose eyes I have closed. As an emptiness takes shape around me, I become more strongly attached to Our Lord and to the various apostolates he has entrusted to me. My friend, God alone remains changeless, near us all our days. He never varies in his presence or in his love. May we remain faithful to him in order to find him again — never to lose him — throughout eternity where he will be our reward and our joy. Let us lift up our hearts.

“How greatly I should like to visit you in England. God has treated you like a pampered child by calling you to labor in a country where there is so much good to do. Here we see storm clouds gather on the horizon. We will have to endure great trials, but God and his Church are ever present!

“Farewell, dear friend. Write often and believe in my unchanging affection in Our Lord.”

This letter is undated and is marked only, “Lavagnac, Thursday.”

THE LEGION OF HONOR

Fr. d’Alzon never refused the Cross of the Legion of Honor. He avoided it. When Louis-Napoleon, then Prince-President, came to Nîmes in 1852, he laid the cornerstone of the church of St. Perpetua. He had decided to decorate both Fr. d’Alzon and the pastor of the parish, Fr. Goubier, on that occasion. When Fr. d’Alzon discovered this, he left Nîmes two days before the ceremony and returned only after the Prince had gone. At the time, he was a member of the Superior Council of Public Education, but a decree soon suppressed his name from the list of members.

A few days before the decree, Cardinal Matthieu, archbishop of Besançon, wrote to Father asking for a favor. He ended his letter thus: “Cardinal though I am, you see me stand before you hat in hand. That’s because you hold the academic sceptre.”

This letter is one of the rare ones that escaped being burnt by Fr. d’Alzon when he destroyed his precious correspondence and voluminous notes, the loss of which, unfortunately, is irreplaceable.

INTIMATE CONVERSATION

In 1858, when I was curate of the Cathedral in Montpellier, Fr. d'Alzon surprised me in my room one day. Needless to say he was welcome. I find in my Journal the account of our conversation. I have hesitated to publish it in Souvenirs because of its intimate character. But I'm writing to brothers. Why, in the intimacy of the family, should I hesitate to say what I'd never reveal to strangers? I'm reluctant to seem to place myself in the forefront. But how can I do otherwise when I'm recounting my own personal souvenirs? Who else could tell what I alone know? So, bravely, let us proceed.

As he entered, Father found me reading a book.

"What are you reading?"

"The Mysticism of Goerres."

"What are you looking for in that book?"

"Obviously, the art of the discernment of spirits, because the book deals with spiritualism and diabolical manifestations."

"You are a real odd-ball!"

"Not surprising, as I have the honor of being your disciple."

"You are also very impertinent."

"You have sometimes told me that I have the spirit of the Assumption."

We both began laughing heartily and changed the topic of our conversation.

Finally, Fr. d'Alzon said, "You always want to have the last word. Fine. But I came to ask you a favor. Teach me how to pray the Rosary."

"To you!"

"Yes, to me. You have a method that I want to follow. Write the method out and show me how to use it."

The method, today well known, I had got from Fr. Corail. It consisted of injecting a mention of a mystery in each "Hail Mary." For example, for the first Joyful Mystery, one might say, "Hail Mary... blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus, whom you conceived...Holy Mary..." Today everyone knows the method.

MYSTERIOUS LETTER

One day while I was a student at Assumption, I was absorbed in reading a letter, in the shade of one of the great mulberry trees in the courtyard. Fr. d'Alzon passed by, immediately recognized the handwriting and stopped short.

"I know that handwriting, even from far away. Where does that letter come from?"

It was a letter from the famous Fr. de la Mennais, and it bore a recent date. It had not been addressed to me, but had been passed to me. Previously I had read a number of such letters. Where had I got them? I will not reveal that.

Without a word Father entered his office. He seemed preoccupied that evening during the study period, and he summoned me.

"The letter you were reading comes from Fr. de la Mennais. Was it addressed to you?"

"No."

"Who passed it on to you?"

"I cannot say. I promised."

"Then I shall not insist. Have you read others from him?"

"Yes, many."

"Do you have them?"

"No, but I was authorized to copy certain passages."

"Would you show me those extracts?"

"I think that I could also let you read the letter you saw me with. But it must remain confidential."

"Agreed. But I believe I know where you got the letters."

Now, in 1894, I know that I can speak without fear of indiscretion. The letter (the last I was able to read) reproached the correspondent for having placed too much confidence in a friend. It said: "When one is young, one is tempted to pour one's heart out, to pour one's heart into the heart of another. How rare it is to find a true friend! When the last wave of youth is past, one finds himself alone on a damp shore. I have spent my life in the midst of a vast crowd and have learned to be on my guard against everyone. Such mistrust has been painful, but deceptions

gave birth to it in my soul...”

There was also this noteworthy phrase: “You ask me if I wrote the pamphlet, “No more tiara!” I am not its author. Do not read it. Do not read it.” When the anonymous brochure had been published, everyone had attributed it to Fr. de la Mennais.

Concerning this last passage, Fr. d’Alzon said, “No, Fr. de la Mennais did not write the pamphlet. Did you read it?”

“No.”

“Do you know the author?”

“No.”

“Promise me that you will not speak of these letters in the College.”

“I promise.”

Fr. de la Mennais knew who the author was. The author himself told me so later. He had written it when his fiery youth had brought him far from the Church. Repenting, he returned to the Church and devoted his maturity and old age to the defense and glorification of the Papacy. His acquaintances knew him as a fervent Catholic, devoted especially to Fr. d’Alzon and the Assumptionists. Somewhat eccentric but full of wit and warmth, he remains in the heart of many generations of Assumptionists. He is the dear and revered Mr. Allemand, who rests in the cemetery of St. Baudile, in the vault built to hold our dear ones.

Among Fr. Alexis’ papers can be found the original papal brief, requested by Mr. Allemand, which bestows upon him, along with a paternal pardon, the apostolic blessing of Pius IX.

This venerable friend often wrote to me during the last years of his life. Often he expressed the wish that his error might be made known so that the example of his honest and loyal return might be an example for others. The atonement was long and generous, as we know, and it was very edifying.

In another series of *sketches* I shall have quite a bit to say about Fr. Ventura, giving details of his relations with Fr. d’Alzon, and I shall have to return to the question of Fr. de la Mennais.

ETIQUETTE LESSON

The Republic was proclaimed in 1848. The *Marseillaise* was added to

the tunes of barrel organs and the red bonnet was in style.

H.R..., from Clermont-l'Hérault, whom we called "le bon roi," was a simple and naive soul if ever there was one, and he fell into step with the crowd. In his innocence he really believed that the government having changed, old customs, like old etiquette, were now abolished.

While recuperating from an illness at his father's house, he wrote to Fr. d'Alzon. He began his letter by the words "Monsieur Alzon," and addressed it to "Monsieur l'abbe Alzon." He might be forgiven much, but not for eliminating the particle from the name of Fr. d'Alzon, headmaster of a school of which most of the students came from the nobility. Father accepted the incident with good humor. He read the letter at assembly and added these remarks:

"My father calls himself d'Alzon, just as the honorable father of H.R...calls himself M.R.... That's why I am "Emmanuel d'Alzon and my correspondent is H.R... In days past it was said in France that the king was the source of all nobility. But *le bon roi* of Assumption, it seems, arrogates to himself the right to put an end to nobility. Without realizing it, he becomes impertinent. We must beware. He may dream of becoming a Danton or a Robespierre! I suggest that his classmates write him a collective letter, mild and affectionate, to bring him back to the right path from which he has strayed. And tell him this: we cannot write to him 'My dear de R..., ' but the absence of the particle in no way diminishes the esteem we have for him. Neither should the presence of the particle in the name of Fr. d'Alzon or of anyone else who has the right to bear it make him forget the rules of propriety and respect toward whoever bears honorably the name he received from his father."

"Le bon roi" hastened to redeem his fault. He later became Fr. H.R..., and pastor in the Montpellier diocese. His zeal, piety, and great charity endeared him to his people. He died young, but his life was fruitful. He is remembered as a good and holy priest.

A GENTLEMAN'S HONESTY

A Prefect of the Empire once menaced Fr. d'Alzon, but tempered his remarks by flattery like this: "You are a distinguished man, a rich and influential priest, and the Government is watching you carefully. Your place is really among the ranks of the French hierarchy."

To this Fr. d'Alzon answered, "*Monsieur le Préfet*, I do not want to become a bishop. All I want is to continue my apostolate in peace and freedom. You say I am rich and influential. I tell you very frankly that if the government opposes my work and prevents me from devoting to it my wealth and my activity, I shall use my wealth and my influence to make war on the government. Take your choice!"

Fr. d'Alzon told me about this himself while we were traveling from Nîmes to Montpellier. I cannot give the exact date because it is not in the notes which I scribbled as soon as I left Father in Montpellier. It must have been prior to 1860.

PILGRIMAGE

Assumptionists love pilgrimages, which are a family inheritance from their intrepid founder. In 1849, during the summer vacations, Fr. d'Alzon organized a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Rochefort. He led a group composed of Messrs. Jules Monnier, Victor Cardenne, L. Ferry, E. Légier, Fr. Blanchet, and me. Mr. Germer-Durand had been obliged to go to Uzès, but he arrived at Rochefort at the same time as we did.

At 3 P.M. we said the "itinerary prayers" in the college chapel and set out. Father didn't walk; he ran. Even before arriving at the Lafoux Inn where we were supposed to have supper and a few hours' sleep, we were exhausted. Some even threw up their supper.

As there were not enough rooms available in this wayside inn, Fr. d'Alzon shared his room with me. I had to sleep in the bed. Father forced me to do it. He slept on the bedside rug, with a sofa pillow, wrapped in a blanket. After a short prayer. Father wound his alarm-watch, set the alarm for 3 A.M., bade his "pasha" good night, and stretched out to sleep as well as he could.

That particular watch, made according to specifications of a donor, had an engraving of the Immaculate Conception on the back. Father was very proud of it, but one day, soon after the pilgrimage, he gave it to one of the college teachers, Fr. Pradelles. For himself Father kept only his worries.

At 3:30, still fasting, we crossed the Gardon River and started the climb toward Rochefort. Obviously Fr. d'Alzon was in pain. He was dragging his feet, and after the meditation he remained silent. All at once

we saw him sitting down on a pile of rocks.

“My friends, I’m stopping here. I can’t go any further. You keep on going. I’ll rest awhile and catch up with you when I can. Galeran will stay with me. He’s no prouder than I am.”

The moon was shining bright. We examined Father’s feet. We noticed that he was wearing new shoes, too tight, which hurt his feet. What to do? Mr. Ferry had the bright idea of cutting the uppers into strips, like sandals. Father then put the shoes back on, stood up, took a few steps, and began to laugh. “You saved my life! This is great! I feel like dancing. Forward!”

We bunched together and started to recite the rosary. The sun inched above the horizon. The skylark soared and sang. Our guide, interrupting our prayer, stood ecstatic before nature, lifted his eyes and arms heavenward. “My God, you are wonderful in your works and good to us. Friends, let us honor the Virgin by the Angelus. The bells must be ringing at this hour.”

Finally we arrived at the base of the mountain and started the climb. Father insisted on going barefoot. We opposed this unanimously, and we succeeded but it was not easy. He celebrated the Eucharist with touching devotion, after having asked us to unite our prayers to his as he fulfilled a vow he had made to come on this pilgrimage. What was the vow for? He never told us, but we all suspected it had to do with his fledgling religious Congregation.

After a dinner presided by Fr. Leon, superior of the Marists, our group split up. Fr. d’Alzon, Fr. Blanchet, and Messrs. Germer-Durand, Monnier, and Cardenne left for the Chartreuse at Valbonne. L. Ferry, E. Légier, and I slept in Avignon, after a four-hour tramp along dusty and seemingly endless roads. We returned to Nîmes by Tarascon and Beaucaire, sunburned, footsore, but happy because we had made a pilgrimage we would always remember.

GRATEFUL HOMAGE

What has become of the happy days when we were kids at Assumption College, with Fr. d’Alzon as headmaster and Fr. Tissot as his assistant?

Can we separate the memory of these two men, Fr. d’Alzon and Fr.

Tissot, who stand out from the group of cherished teachers? I still remember clearly the day in late 1844 when I arrived at Assumption. I was eleven years old. Fr. Tissot received me in the parlor. I see him still tall, slim, slightly stooped, in a cassock too long and too big for him. He carried his biretta on his left arm like a book. He looked sweet and sympathetic, a real “mama” in cassock.

“My child,” he said, “you want to enter Assumption College? Fine, I’ll admit you; but you must remember this: in chapel, pray well; in study-hall and classroom, work hard; in refectory, eat heartily; in recreation, play with all your might, and everything will be fine.”

I was then led to my monitor, the humble and sweet Leon d’Everlange, who was still a deacon because he was not old enough to be ordained to the priesthood.

The next day, I was summoned to meet Fr. d’Alzon. I had never seen him from up close. I was very shy and I trembled at the thought of going to the headmaster’s office. I almost lost all courage as I rapped on his door and heard him call out, “Come in,” in a voice far different from Fr. Tissot’s.

I went in. He was seated at his desk, which had a large ivory crucifix on it. He looked at me attentively. He examined me from head to toe, and his gaze was piercing. He saw my fear, smiled, and placed his hand on my head in a friendly way. He said to me, “You will go to the French class. Mr. Cusse and Mr. Guiot will be your teachers. Mr. Durand will find out where you are up to. Is it true that you want to become a priest?”

“Yes.”

“Then you will have to study Latin. Go and say a little prayer and we will fix everything up. Mr. Monnier spoke to me about you; he was present when you played the role of Athaliah. He says that you managed quite well as an actor. But you must not have been afraid then as you are now?” As he said this, I managed to blurt out, “I wasn’t timid then. You weren’t there!”

Father laughed heartily and gave me leave to go. From that moment on I loved that man. My heart was his and he has always had it. In heaven, Father, we shall find each other again. May God grant me that

grace!

Divine Goodness has left “Mama Tissot” with us still. He is laying up stores for heaven, amassing treasures for eternity, and by now must have accumulated quite a fortune. He has not forgotten what the Curé of Ars told him one day, “We shall see each other in heaven.”

This phrase is more precious than gold. It can raise one up farther than if Fr. Tissot used one of his famous balloons. I was Fr. Tissot’s confidant while he was constructing them. On the floor of the big boys’ dormitory, he had traced their outline. After cutting the paper, we had to glue the balloons together. This was done secretly in a room that no longer exists, in “Noah’s Ark.”

The great day arrived and we left for Mas Boulbon. There were three large packages. What was in them? No one knew. After lunch, a trumpet call blared out. “Balloon ascension!” There were three balloons: two small trial ones and a large one for the “real thing.”

The first balloon was inflated but caught fire and disappeared in smoke. The second rose about fifteen feet, fell down and burned in the blink of an eye. But these were only trials. Here’s the real thing, dubbed Assumption. It was inflated; its shape was graceful. The sides were held together by strips of blue paper. It was blue and white, the school colors.

The burner, containing hanks of oakum soaked in alcohol, was ignited. The balloon was about to rise when Fr. Tissot stopped it. With a large syringe he sprayed water all over the interior to prevent it from catching fire. Unfortunately the water softened the paper. Nonetheless it started to rise amid the happy cries of the students. To get it off to a flying start, Fr. Tissot gave the balloon two solid punches. Result: disaster. His fists punched holes in the softened balloon and the hot air escaped. The burner was not strong enough to compensate and everything collapsed and...burned. Every face showed disappointment, except Fr. Tissot’s. He said simply, “Let’s play prisoner’s base. The next time we’ll do better.”

“Mama Tissot” never stopped for one moment his own ascent toward heaven. We haven’t lost sight of him yet, thank God, but he’s already very far up. We mustn’t be afraid; he won’t crash like his balloons. The fire burning in him is a life-giving one that spreads its warmth up to Divine Love itself.

Sketches by H.D.Galeran

This ends the first series of *Sketches*, some sixty of them. Fr. Picard wrote to me: "Why don't you jot down your souvenirs as they occur to you, without trying to organize them. A fact, a word, a trait, noted in a few brief lines, could then immediately be shared with all our houses. Our duty, as true sons of Fr. d'Alzon, is to assure that our Father lives for future generations. No one understood his times better than he. By remembering his actions we are certainly doing something good."

I followed the advice of my old comrade and friend. I wrote simply and unpretentiously, caring only to be exact and to avoid exaggeration. I wanted only to present to my dear Assumptionists the face of their Father in all its natural beauty and truthful expression. The work was done for members of the family only. If I succeeded, I thank God for letting me remember so much of the past and allowing me to give to my beloved Assumptionists a proof of my brotherly love.

I shall now await their opinion, and I ask them to tell me frankly whether or not I should draw additional *Sketches*.

H.D. G.

August 19, 1894.

SECOND SERIES

On October 26, 1894, Fr. François Picard wrote to Canon Galeran:

“My dear friend, I should have thanked you for the *Sketches*, so interesting, so Assumptionist, which you have sent to us concerning our dear and revered Fr. d’Alzon. They pleased all the religious and I read them with great joy.

“I should also have thanked you for the charming suggestion in the last *sketch*, and immediately asked you to continue your work. What I did not do then, I hasten to do now. I urge you to send us a second series as soon as possible.

“What a fine memory you have, and what order, to help your memory. I am envious of the notes you took daily. They would enable me to relive the pleasant life of an Assumption student. Because you possess this treasure, share it with the children of Fr. d’Alzon.”

Concerning this, Canon Galeran wrote:

“With such a letter almost officially accrediting him to the Assumptionists, the author doesn’t hesitate to begin a second series of *Sketches*. But he repeats that he write exclusively for the Assumptionists.”

H.D. G.

FOUR POINTS OF THE COMPASS

Toward the end of the 1850 academic year, four students of Assumption College, three of them very distinguished young men, happened to be in Fr. d'Alzon's room which was then just above the parlor. It still exists. As they were leaving, Fr. d'Alzon suddenly stopped them in the ante-chamber. He moved them to form a kind of cross, with each couple of lads facing each other. François Picard was North; Anatole de Cabrières, already clad in seminary cassock, was South; Paul de Pèlerin was West; and Henri Galeran was East. Four main points of the compass. Then, with surprising solemnity, Father traced the sign of the cross from north to south, from east to west. Smiling, he said simply, "Isn't this strange?"

Father's thought, which he later explained to me, was this: "Anatole and François want to follow me; Henri and Paul want to take another road. These four young men will depart, two by two, toward different vocations, it seems." It was thus that I first learned about François Picard's decision. Though we were very close, he had never mentioned it, except possibly to Paul de Pèlerin.

This is the present situation of these four compass points: North there is Fr. Picard, Superior General of the Assumptionists; South, His Excellency Bishop de Cabrières, of Montpellier; West, Mr. de Pèlerin, former magistrate, honest and upright, the soul of many charitable works. He cannot be tied down, incessantly and restlessly traveling in any direction where there is good to be done. I am in the East, as an apostolic missionary, and I dig up the old times of Assumption, to teach the young and remind the elders about some intimate details of the life of the man they *revere* as their Father and founder.

Fr. d'Alzon said to me one day, "You should go to the Near East. You'll end up by going there." Instead, I left for England because that was what Pius IX desired. Yet here I am in 1894 in Jerusalem, looking over notes I took in 1850.

Let's go back for a few moments and rejoin those four "compass points" as they gathered for a supper. The Assumptionists will thus discover the first call to religious life of their present Superior General.

It was a summer evening, long after the meeting mentioned above.

The four students were gathered around the table of François Picard's home in St. Gervasy. I remember it very clearly. The fellows were bubbling with youth, their youth of forty years ago. We were fresh, nimble, without cares; our hair was dark and our complexion, if not rosy, was at least healthy. What remains of all that?

With an appetite sharpened by a long walk, we devoured a succulent rabbit stew. On our plates we left only the bones, as clean as polished ivory. That may seem a bit like gluttony. But I must leave that aside and get back to my story. Anatole and Henri, already acquainted with Fr. d'Alzon's plans for a religious congregation, were conversing. Paul seemed pensive. What was he thinking about? He never said. François, cool and collected, seemed quite intrigued by something we had said, but he never let on. He soon understood exactly what we were talking about and it revealed to him a project he had until then ignored.

He showed no surprise and never questioned his friends. He kept what he had heard to himself, but from that moment on he seemed destined to religious life. Unhurried, with his usual calmness, he thought things over. One day, he offered himself to Fr. d'Alzon. We know the result. But many may not know what Fr. Pernet — upon whom I now call — knows very well. After a speech by François Picard, on a feast of the Holy Innocents, Fr. d'Alzon, struck by the clarity, logic, and common sense of the speech, cried out, "He will be my successor."

Without entering into great detail, let me say that François Picard's vocation was for Fr. d'Alzon a rich compensation for the defection of his first two chosen disciples. I say defection, but must immediately soften and explain the term. The bishop of Montpellier and the apostolic missionary never really left their Father, this venerable priest who left upon their soul a profound imprint. He was for them a guide, a friend whom they loved, whose works they cherished, with an affection that goes beyond death. Such love is never lost, but rather increases beyond the grave, by the grace of God.

Despite their different callings, Anatole, François, Paul and Henri, placed by Fr. d'Alzon at different points of the compass, always remained in the heart of the great man who loved them like sons. They remained faithful to his teachings. His memory perfumes and strengthens their soul. His spirit warms them, urges them on, and assures

their advance.

The last and the least of the four writes this, for the edification of the younger Assumptionists. The old-timers will feel rejuvenated as they remember times past. Fr. Picard just wrote that these *Sketches* “enable me to re-live the pleasant life of an Assumption student.”

INTIMATE REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS

The power of art is limited. The artist who tries to reproduce the features of a person can, with his genius and resources, show only one attitude, one particular circumstance at a time. He tries to seize his subject in the most usual or most advantageous pose. Then he idealizes and ennobles. He gives neatness of line, splendor of color, and exquisite details which will cause the viewers of his masterpiece to exclaim, “He lives and breathes. He lacks only speech.” Still, Holbein’s *Thomas More*, Philippe de Champaigne’s *Richelieu*, or Rigaud’s *Bossuet*, with all their artistic perfection, can represent only one pose, one attitude, one expression. They would never make us know these great men unless we had the details of their lives from other sources. They are frozen into immobility.

Neither painting, nor sculpture, nor photography will make Fr. d’Alzon known to us. To draw a pen-sketch of him, one must return to the past. One must see Fr. d’Alzon before him, moving, looking, speaking. The scene must become alive before our eyes, and we must hasten to show the scene without immobilizing it.

I admit that my present work will be only a *sketch*. The masterpiece that Fr. Emmanuel is working on will be the finished project.⁴

Alongside this fine literary work, these *Sketches* will still be useful, because they give less formal, more familiar glimpses. The *Sketches* reveal the more relaxed, more intimate Fr. d’Alzon while Fr. Emmanuel will show his glorious exterior activity. Why this lengthy introduction? To justify the boldness of what I am about to write about some facets of

⁴ Galeran wrote this in late 1894. Fr. Emmanuel Bailly had already published two volumes of *Notes et Documents* which were intended as the raw material for a later biography of Fr. d’Alzon. Galeran is referring to these two volumes. Eventually, Father Emmanuel published four and a half volumes of *Notes et Documents* but they cover only until 1850.

Fr. d'Alzon, details omitted by biographers, but which we are pleased to find whenever we read an interesting biography.

As he vested for Mass, Father would always throw the stole very far back, keeping just enough in front to tuck into the cincture. He made large genuflections, in the sense that he pushed his right foot back so far that it stretched beyond the predella unless it was unusually wide.

At the offertory, and even at the consecration, he seized the chalice by the upper cup, rather than by the knop. He joined his hands at chest level, almost at the base of the neck. He read distinctly but rapidly. To respond to the *Suscipiat* you had to be on your toes because the *Orate fratres* was finished in an instant. I was always unable to keep up with him as he read the last gospel from St. John. Others have said the same thing. Nonetheless, his gestures were solemn and dignified, never rushed. His face reflected his great faith and his tender and sincere piety. His signs of the cross over the Eucharistic bread and wine were precise and solemn. It was a pleasure to see his beautiful hand trace the cross over the chalice, the host or the congregation. All his gestures were impressive.

He knew the rubrics perfectly and insisted that they be followed. Canon Reboul, a member of the Nîmes cathedral chapter, used to say, "In the whole diocese, there are only two canonists and rubricists, Fr. d'Alzon and I."

On one occasion, after my ordination, Fr. d'Alzon asked me, "Does Fr. Hippolyte celebrate Mass well?" "Yes, very piously."

"That's not what I mean. He is a young priest and I want to know whether he follows the rubrics for the ceremonies."

"He's not exactly what you could call exact. Sometimes he neglects the rubrics."

"Fine. Write down those remarks. I shall speak to him."

"Father, you won't tell him the remarks came from me?"

"Well now! Why shouldn't I do so if I think it appropriate? Do you think he'll confine you to quarters for that? Your fears of the past are returning."

As vicar-general, he wore only a simple, unadorned cambric rochet beneath his cowl. The other canons wore lace and fancy embroideries

which Father called “leguminous.” “These embroideries,” he laughingly said, “have exhausted all the flowers in the garden and are now reduced to showing the vegetables.”

During his series of commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul at the Sunday masses, Father would preach from the altar, seated, with the missal open in his lap. The missal, incidentally, was a small one that had just arrived from the presses of the Propaganda in Rome. It had come precisely while Bp. Vérolles, apostolic vicar for Manchuria and friend of Fr. Hippolyte, was in Nîmes. Fr. d’Alzon wanted the saintly prelate to be the first to use the missal, in the cathedral of Nîmes. Along with other students, I was present at that Mass. Before leaving the altar, Bp. Vérolles also consecrated a chalice for Assumption College. It’s still there.

Returning now to my topic. Because Fr. d’Alzon preached these commentaries while seated, with the chasuble, he had ordered a special chair without arms and with low back, upholstered in crimson velvet. In 1891 it was still being used by the celebrant. It was with deep feeling that I used it myself for the eleventh anniversary of Fr. d’Alzon’s death. A flood of memories returned, in this chapel, at this altar where I had so often served his Mass.

Usually, Father was left-handed. You will note that his photographs show that he parted his hair on the right, as do people who comb themselves with their left hand. He shaved quite a few times weekly. Until his death, he wore quite heavy sideburns — that was the custom of priests at the time of his ordination. In this, as in everything else, Fr. Alexis imitated Fr. d’Alzon. Fr. d’Alzon’s black hair hung in curls down to his neck. He began wearing his hair shorter when he donned religious garb.

He walked very straight, with head held high and slightly back. He walked fast, with short, rapid steps. He was said to be a fine horseman; at least that was his reputation in the region around the château of Lavagnac. He was an excellent swimmer and diver. We alumni can vouch for this because we saw him swim in the choppy sea, in the rushing Rhone, and in the quiet Gardon. Let’s not speak of the muddy Vistre River, in which he often went swimming, but quite far from Nîmes.

He could run well too. I remember one summer day when we older students were taking an evening walk. Suddenly Father got the idea of running to “Mas de Boulbon” to surprise Bp. Cart, who was vacationing there, as he finished supper. The bishop, hearing us rush in, cried out, “Yes, that’s Assumption all right!” That’s exactly what he would have said, now in 1894, if he had lived to see the Assumptionists return from one of their pilgrimages!

Readers of these *Sketches* must not forget that I am an old-timer and have witnessed changes. I mean that, having lived with Vicar-General d’Alzon, then with Fr. d’Alzon the monk, I can easily contrast both parts of this great and beautiful life. Those who can still do so are now rare indeed.

Let’s continue digging in this mine, which becomes richer as we dig deeper. At the daily assemblies, whenever Fr. d’Alzon arrived at the name of a student who deserved a reprimand, he would stop and place his sheet on the desk. Raising his eyes and rubbing his hands, he would remain silent for a moment. These were the signs of a coming bomb-blast. One day, Fr. Corail, a Jesuit who had just preached us a retreat, was present at assembly. He soon understood from Fr. d’Alzon’s manner that someone was about to be taken to task. He spoke up, “Just for today, do me the favor of not reprimanding students with poor conduct grades. For once, ‘May they rest in peace.’”

Father graciously smiled acquiescence. There was no reprimand. But there was its equivalent, with a vengeance, so to speak. Every time Father came to the name of some poor unfortunate, he would read it loudly, turn toward the Jesuit, and add, “This one! May he rest in peace.”

Another detail, to conclude this *sketch* which is becoming a veritable mosaic. I was present only once for an alumni banquet. In 1857 while I was curate in Montpellier, I unknowingly arrived in Nîmes the day before the banquet. Everybody supposed that I had come for the alumni reunion. I paid my twenty franc fee but decided to leave early, before the banquet in order to avoid the meeting. Why? I don’t know. Fr. d’Alzon had said to me, “This time we’ll get you.”

My answer was evasive, probably somewhat clumsy, and Father looked at me silently, suspecting something. I thought I had escaped,

and on the morning of the reunion left for the railroad station to take the express. Just as I arrived at the ticket window, there was Fr. d'Alzon smiling wickedly. "Here you are! I thought you would try some trick on me. Come along, friend, I'm not letting you escape. We dine in a few hours and old friends will be enchanted to see you again." I let myself be led back to the College, humble, submissive, and somewhat embarrassed.

THE TEACHER

In the first series of *Sketches*, we considered Fr. d'Alzon as headmaster. Let's try now to see him as teacher.

During the 1848-9 academic year, Father accepted to teach a course on Church history, every Thursday at 11 A.M. Those in the course always deplored the fact that important occupations prevented this interesting and erudite teacher from teaching the course beyond the first few months. One thing they did gain: the proper way of studying history, rising above details to an over-all view which showed the action of God, holding human events in his hand and never abdicating his supreme dominion, always remaining the Master while respecting the liberty he had given to man.

This was Father's method of teaching: he came to class with his class notes and our textbook. His notes were divided in two: on the right he wrote his lesson outline, on the left he jotted thoughts that came to him as he spoke.

Allow me to digress to say that while he was teaching this course Father first appeared wearing a black velvet Clementine (a cloth hat covering the ears and nape). I never forgot this detail because of the neuralgia Father suffered from at the time. Despite his pain, he continued his classes. As we know, his will was like tempered steel.

He began classes by reviewing the homework we had done since the previous class, and his remarks were always apposite and frequently witty. Then followed the lesson itself. As he spoke we took notes. Because his presentation was so clear and his diction so distinct, most students could take definitive notes that they had no need to revise later. Remaining time was spent answering questions and objections. That's when we appreciated him most. He answered every question as if he had

foreseen everything. Never was he caught unawares. He seemed like a living encyclopedia. We were enthralled by the scope of his knowledge.

Occasionally students presented him with written objections. Father liked that, because they were models of composition, eloquence, and reasoning. I still have some of them. The best came from Edgar de Balincourt, Numa Baragnon, Anatole de Cabrières. Father carefully kept a whole collection of them.

In my notes, I find some masterly presentations by this fine professor and lecturer. Because they reveal the main lines of his teaching and style, I present them verbatim, as they were presented in the opening lecture of the course.

“God is sole and absolute Master. He made man for himself. To him return the waves of life of which he is the source as well as the end. *Principium et finis.*”

“He has always had on earth an official representative: first, Adam, then the patriarchs. After Moses the office of representative was split up: the high priest and the king, united under one law but separated as regards their functions. Then Christ the Messiah appears, uniting in his person both priesthood and royalty. The new priesthood comes to him directly from God, not through heredity. Royalty he gets naturally by the blood of the Virgin Mary of the race of David, and legally from St. Joseph, the last of the patriarchs, son and heir to David. Joseph dies just as Jesus is about to begin his public ministry. Consequently Jesus presents himself as priest and as legitimate heir to the rights of David. The Jews knew that and never contested his title as Son of David, which belongs to the Savior. ‘Jesus, son of David,’ cries Bartimaeus, the blind man of Jericho, ‘Have pity on me.’ No voice dared protest.

“After the Ascension, the high priesthood, the patriarchal and royal dignity were passed to Peter and to his successors. We cannot deny the fact! The Pope is the first man of the world, the real firstborn, by right. He is still priest and sovereign of an immense empire, more widespread and firm than the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church. His jurisdiction extends to all those who have been baptized. Indirectly he also cares for the non-baptized because he was commissioned to bring everyone into the sheepfold of Jesus Christ. According to Innocent III, these latter are ‘other sheep I have that are not of this fold and these I have to lead as

well' (Jn 10:16).

"Have you ever noticed in the Gospel the words of Jesus to his disciples, 'It is for your good that I am going' (Jn 16:7)? As long as Jesus was on earth, the disciples were like little children, disciples forming a tiny band. After the Ascension, and especially after Pentecost, they presented themselves to the world as heirs in full possession of their inheritance, as many leaders under a supreme leader. Instead of being only a small band, they increased their sphere of activity, divided up the world and established the universal society which is the Catholic Church. As St. Augustine said, 'The Holy Spirit at Pentecost changed them from disciples to masters and made them teachers of the world.'

"Thus did patriarchs succeed patriarchs. Thus Joseph died at the right moment to allow Jesus to appear in the fullness of his rights and in the majestic splendor of his personality. Then the Savior disappeared in order to make of the Apostles so many princes.

"Generations of humans, shaken up by various events, hurl themselves, like ocean waves, against the immovable rock upon which is seated God's representative, true monarch of the world, ancient of the human race by a transmitted right, successor of Peter, Vicar of Jesus Christ. Before the Incarnation everything acted for the people of God. Since the Incarnation everything acts for the Church. In a word: Jesus Christ is the beginning, the middle, and the end of history. We'll never discover the key to events and revolutions, we'll lack foresight, we'll fall into fault after fault unless we adopt one sure and wise policy: study the will of God, to bow before his authority and lead peoples along his way which alone can lead to happiness and salvation."

I've changed nothing of these notes. I haven't even corrected imprecise expressions or unclear style. I wanted to give, as such, the notes of one of Father's students, written rapidly as he lectured. This was in 1848, and now in 1894 I find in these old memories, so long silent, a charm which I'd like to share with my readers.

During those wonderful hours, we learned to know and love the Church, which was shown to us as something great and beautiful. During that time, we experienced and admired the broad knowledge of Fr. d'Alzon. His teaching was clear, lively, attractive and so deeply etched into my memory that I believe I could reproduce without effort

his lectures which were, unfortunately, only fragments of a vast plan he was never able to complete.

What good that man did to our minds and our hearts. May his memory be for us a blessing! Happily I give this testimonial before his younger sons.

SHOES

It is June, 1861. Fr. d'Alzon and I are all alone in a first-class compartment of an express train running from Nîmes to Montpellier. Father, somewhat fatigued, had stretched his legs to the opposite seat. He was wearing the kind of shoes he always wore, a kind of slipper, without buckles. Even before becoming a religious he never wore buckled shoes. Instead of ornament, the right shoe had a couple of clumsy patches, one on the right, the other on the left. I was looking at these when Father said, "My friend, your stare is somewhat long and your amazement somewhat ridiculous. What do you have to say? Didn't the cobbler do a good job? If there were two holes, he had to put two patches."

"You're right, Father, two patches were needed, given the fact that the holes are so far apart." Mentally I was saying, Is Father d'Alzon, vicar-general and canon, always neatly but simply dressed, reduced to this? Aloud I said, "What would the Viscountess d'Alzon say had she lived to see what I see?"

"Rest easy, my friend. My poor mother saw worse than this even when her son was vicar-general and canon (which he still is if you please, but with a monastic cowl added). My impoverished state was always very brief, for my excellent mother would regularly send me new clothes."

"I know. And I know too that as soon as they arrived you would distribute them to the poor."

"That's no concern of yours. Couldn't I do as I wished with my own clothes? Is your eye bad because I wanted to be charitable?"

"God forbid. But my eye has seen and my mind understood how generously you acted, under pretext of being master of your own goods, in order to waste or lose, but always for others. You'll do it again most probably."

“Thank you for your remark. I admire your prophetic tone.”

“Father, let’s go back to where we started.”

“To Nîmes?”

“No, to your slippers. Those two patches offend me.”

“In that case, take my slippers and give me yours.”

“I’d never dare go out in Montpellier with shoes like yours.”

“Listen son, you’re too proud. If you’re not proud, you’re vain. If you’re neither proud nor vain, you’re too stylish. Believe me, let’s wear patched shoes and threadbare cassocks, provided the shoes are shined and the cassock brushed and neat.

“After all, I am a religious, with vows of poverty. Don’t I have to be an example for my religious? If you should have to speak of me after I’m dead, you’ll be happier to be able to say that I wore repaired shoes, a worn cassock, a crushed hat, rather than have to admit how preoccupied I was by my person, my clothes, my shoes, or my hair. Never forget what I’m about to say: under pretext of not offending society and of approaching it in a decent and dignified way, we let ourselves go to superfluous and useless cares. My patched shoes will not prevent even a single sinner from coming to me for confession, yet they seem to scandalize you, a priest, who should have more sound ideas. Imagine Peter and Paul going to the hair-dresser, or buying a new snow-white toga, before presenting themselves before Nero or the judges of Rome! I want to fill my disciples — and you too if I can — with a spirit of absolute detachment. With men free from all worldly ties, we can turn the world upside down as the Apostles did.”

Our train was pulling in to the Montpellier station. As he descended from the coach, Fr. d’Alzon added, “Don’t be too hard to please, my friend. The day may come when you’ll have to wear shoes even more patched than mine, and repaired by yourself, not by a cobbler. What a fine job that will be! You’ll envy my fine shoes then. Don’t forget this final advice.”

Father went into town on business and I went home, pondering what I’d just heard. His last statements struck me especially. I don’t pretend that they were prophetic, but they came back to me when I was a missionary at Llanhern in Cornwall. I was obliged to walk long

distances to see my parishioners spread everywhere between the Channel and the Atlantic Ocean. More than once I had to repair my own shoes because I never could find a cobbler. As I didn't have the proper materials at hand, I had to use ordinary twine. The repair work was not beautiful but it was solid. It was then that I remembered Father's shoes and I laughed.

I would like to add an important note here. I don't think I have many readers beyond the alumni of Assumption. But those who have borne with me so far will have noted that I have scrupulously avoided mentioning anything that seems miraculous. I have heard many extraordinary things said about Father. I did not see everything and have had no cause to examine everything. I confess that I have no need of the miraculous. Ignatius of Loyola, or Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, or many others whom we honor as saints, never performed a single miracle while they lived. It was enough for me to see Fr. d'Alzon in the constant and heroic practice of the cardinal virtues, with their supernatural perfecting by the theological virtues. That I did see and am ready to swear to it. I don't want to anticipate the judgments of the Church. I can say that we don't seem to make enough use of Fr. d'Alzon in cases where his intervention might manifest itself.

THE BUST OF CHRIST THE TEACHER

Atop a vestment case in the sacristy of Assumption College there was, at least in 1891, a bust of Christ. It was really a plaster cast of the magnificent head of Christ the Teacher from the tympanum of the Amiens cathedral. It had been brought to Nîmes by Fr. de Cabrières when he returned from celebrations in Arras on the occasion of the beatification of Joseph-Benoit Labre. Fr. de Cabrières had gone there with Bishop Plantier. How did the bust get to Assumption College? I don't know exactly but I do know that Father often gave his treasures to the College after he had enjoyed them for a while. This particular bust is the one that belonged to my old friend. Fr. Alexis assured me of that in 1891 when I visited the school.

One day, in the residence of the bishop of Nîmes, I was in Fr. de Cabrières' room along with Fr. d'Alzon. The bust had just arrived and was on the table. Fr. d'Alzon's remarks on that occasion struck me and I hastened to note them down as usual. He said, "You see, my friend, that

is really the Incarnate Word. Notice the nobility of the figure, which is at the same time divine and royal, despite a slight stiffness that the sculptor's chisel could not or would not avoid. What calm! What gentleness! What eyes! Calm and clear, full of life, sweetness and love. It has an irresistible charm, a fascination both mysterious and delicious.

“The center of the main portal of the ancient cathedral is an ideal position for this superb sculpture. The Savior is seated amid a semicircle of Apostles and bishops, who listen to him very attentively, while angels descend in order to admire and adore.

“This kind of ideal statue, since the Incarnation, has completely replaced the material grandeur of Greek art. There is no longer a middle ground. To use Pascal's expression, art now can only be ‘angel or beast.’ It is beastly when it is not Christian. We cannot do better than ancient sculpture when it's a question of form, but we surpass pagan art if we rise to the sublime expression which Jesus gave to human nature when he remodeled it into the image of God.

“Jesus and the Immaculate Virgin are henceforth the ideal artistic types. To be sure artists can still make bodies, torsos, and nudes in all kinds of poses, but we'll never succeed in making something really beautiful if it lacks the radiance of the face ‘of the most beautiful of the sons of man.’ Virginal purity and gentleness are Christian virtues.”

I cannot forget my feelings when, after an absence of twenty-five years, I was vesting for Mass in the sacristy and saw the bust on the occasion of the eleventh anniversary of the death of Fr. d'Alzon. It rekindled old memories.

INFLUENCE UPON THE PEOPLE

Father d'Alzon's influence upon the multitude was prodigious. Where did his prestige come from? From his name? His fortune? His commanding presence? His eloquence? No. Without doubt these gifts may prove very attractive, but they elicit only the admiration, respect and deference that we usually have for any outstanding person.

Fr. d'Alzon's influence went further, deeper; he reigned over hearts. People loved him because they felt loved by him. He understood people, to whom he gave himself with all the strength of his noble soul. He was a real leader among men. His wishes were commands. His words

electrified the masses. He was followed enthusiastically, passionately, almost deliriously. Doesn't his memory still have an astonishing fascination?

He knew how to treat people with respect and tact, with a heart that was generous and unselfish. He spoke to even the most humble with exquisite courtesy, in simple and familiar language. He treated even the poorest with utmost delicacy. For him, poverty was a dignity. He seemed to know everyone and be at ease with everybody. All seemed genuinely pleased to approach him and have a word with him. Above all, he cared for souls; but he also took care of material privation and bodily sufferings. He often nursed sick people with his own hands, like a Sister of Charity. I've heard poor people, with tears of gratitude in their eyes, recounting how this holy priest became their infirmarian, washing them and bandaging their sores.

What did he not do for the people of Nîmes? What works did he not create to help and console unfortunate people? That's why the poor remained his friends, steadfast in their affection, whereas some of the upper class, including the clergy, opposed his endeavors, found fault with his zeal, and ridiculed his actions — because they did not understand their purity or their greatness.

Let me cite an example of why poor people understood him. At Assumption College there was, and still is, a Conference of St. Vincent de Paul. Students visited the poor in their homes. To Paul de Pèlerin and his friends was entrusted the section of Nîmes where the weavers lived, between the roads leading to Uzès and Avignon. An old paralytic and his daughter lived there in back of a dilapidated house, beyond a yard filled with junk and manure, in a dirty, damp, and airless cave. The cripple slept on the only bed while his daughter slept on a pile of old rags and mildewed straw. I've seen Paul de Pèlerin airing out the rags in the courtyard. I've seen him bathe the old man and make his bed. I once took part in a sort of little family feast brought in by my friend. Seated on a wooden box, Paul tried to encourage the old man and his daughter to eat the food. Their joy was a pleasure to behold. They laughed until they cried, laughter of happiness, tears of gratitude. That's how Fr. d'Alzon trained his students.

It was decided to find more suitable lodging for the couple. The

Conference would pay the rent. Finally, a second-story room was found, not far from the school. How could the paralyzed man be moved there?

Someone suggested laying the old man on a dumpcart and covering him with a horse-blanket. Hiring a carriage was out of the question as soon as the coachmen discovered what it was for. Fr. d'Alzon heard about his students' project. "What," he exclaimed, "An old wagon? Never! We must treat the poor with greater respect than that. Aren't they Jesus Christ's friends? Give me a few moments and I'll find a solution to your problem." He hurried immediately to the home of Countess de B..., to ask her to lend her sedan-chair which, incidentally, was no longer being used. He explained why he wanted it and she immediately gave permission.

We therefore saw this poor old paralytic, revoltingly dirty, seated on fine green velvet cushions, in a gilded chair with beveled glass. The exterior paintings showed winged genii, plump as ortolans, floating and wandering amid garlands of flowers. On the door was emblazoned the coat-of-arms of the Count. It was so rich and brilliant that part of the chair had to be hidden by a rug as it was carried across Nîmes, amid an escort of Assumption College students. That's how Fr. d'Alzon treated the poor of Jesus Christ. By this example you can judge all the rest.

I reminded Paul de Pèlerin of this episode when I last saw him in Paris. He seemed to remember it only vaguely. I understand this. He forgets the noble part he played. He never took notes of the good he did. I took them for him and today I do not regret it.

To seize Father's character completely, we must always remember that his sole preoccupation was the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. He saw God everywhere and in everything. He founded Assumption College. He gathered the heirs of southern French aristocracy, not to surround himself with aristocrats, but because he believed that if he formed the children of the upper classes for God, for Church and Nation, he was preparing, for the future, beneficial forces for the good of the people.

To be sure, his efforts were not unsuccessful, but his ambition was not satisfied. He would have liked to recruit from the aristocracy and upper classes many priestly and religious vocations. He was proud of but not dazzled by the achievements of many of his alumni. He would have liked to see more of his disciples become apostles. This desire was so

powerful that in the last years of his life he bared his soul to an assembly in the College chapel. Those present recall that Father became extremely eloquent on this occasion, and they were deeply impressed. Here are some passages from this talk, which a friend sent me in England.

“After all the years since the foundation of this college, after all the success which has crowned the devotion of the teachers, at a time when many former pupils hold high and honorable positions in society, I must confess, with discouragement in my soul, that, despite some good which has been done, I have not succeeded in giving to the Church the vocations which I dreamed and planned to offer her.

“So with St. Paul and St. Barnabas I say, ‘We had to proclaim the word of God to you first, but since you have rejected it... we must turn to the pagans (Acts 13:46). I have decided to turn to the lower classes, that is, to robust, simple, devoted, energetic youth, to the sons of the people whose faith will not flinch in the face of sacrifices. With God’s help, I hope to find there the resources I need to give to the Church of Jesus Christ priests and religious according to his heart. They will hear my voice, they will heed my call, as it is written, ‘They will rejoice, giving glory to the word of the Lord...’”

Fr. d’Alzon’s voice was indeed heard and his call understood. Look about us to see a really miraculous success. Flourishing under God’s blessing, the alummates send forth swarms of young men each year to seminaries and various religious orders. Almost all the Assumptionists come from alummates. These houses are amazingly fertile. The quality of their alumni makes us thank God for inspiring Fr. d’Alzon to create such sources of zeal, devotion, faith, intelligence, and fearless bravery. These are the marks of true nobility. Results have justified Fr. d’Alzon’s wise decision. From Assumption College and the old school at Clichy, only some fifteen alumni became religious. Add to that some twenty secular priests and you have the total of vocations for fifty years, from 1845 to 1895. On the other hand, there are many sons of the alummates (many of whom never knew Fr. d’Alzon personally) who have enthusiastically joined his regiments, now carry his banners, and repeat his battle-cry, “Thy Kingdom Come.”

Fr. d’Alzon had ample reason to write on October 15, 1875, “How can we doubt the providential inspiration of the idea of alummates, when

we consider the obscure beginnings and their marvelous progress.”

FATHER’S POOR ROOM IN “NOAH’S ARK”

In the section of Assumption College called “Noah’s Ark” there was a series of rooms on the second floor, to the right as you went up the stairs. The windows opened on the courtyard of the senior boys, except the window of the last room which overlooked the juniors’ yard. Fr. d’Alzon’s room was the first one as you entered the corridor. Next was Mr. Tissot’s room; then Victor Cardenne’s, and the last, Mr. Cusse’s.

During the summer of 1849, the walls of these rooms were knocked down in order to make another dormitory for the youngest pupils. Only the history of Jerusalem, demolished and re-built about eighteen times, can give an idea of the many times Noah’s Ark was changed. The upheavals of Jerusalem eventually came to an end, but the changes in the central wing of Assumption will continue with each new headmaster, abetted by the Prefect of Discipline. It is traditional that the Prefects be the Nebuchadnezzars of Noah’s Ark. It would not surprise me to hear, even as these lines are being written, picks, axes, and hammers noisily preparing a study hall where the dining hall had been, or changing classrooms into a dining hall. Strangely, all these renovations never touched the exterior of the building, which is in 1895 what it was in 1844.

However, I wanted to write about Fr. d’Alzon’s room. As we know, he suffered from violent stomach cramps. The attacks were intermittent and of varying length and seriousness. Usually, he swept his own room and made his own bed. When his illness became too painful, he would call me to help him or he would pass me his room key and ask me to clean up the place. Rarely did he allow anyone else in this room. It was a real monk’s cell with whitewashed walls. To the left as you entered was the bed: two saw-horses, three boards, and a hard straw mattress. Facing the door, against the wall, a green cotton curtain hung from brass rings and hid his clothes. To the right, facing the bed, was a plain wooden table with a crucifix, a statuette of the Virgin, and a skull. Nearby were a small chest of drawers and a night-stand like those in the dormitories.

On top of the chest was a three-shelf bookcase, holding such books as *The Bible*, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, *Treatise on the Mass*, by

Cardinal Bona, a fine Elzevir edition of the *Imitation of Christ*, and a few Rules of religious orders. Besides that there were only two ordinary chairs and a bedside rug. No easy chair! Never did I see an easy chair in Father's room. I think I'm accurate in my description, because I often took inventory of the cell when I was there alone.

It will surprise no one if I admit that I saw Father's instruments of penance: his freshly bloodied discipline; his bracelets and belt of iron barbs, his goatskin hair-shirt in the form of a large scapular, shoulder-to-shoulder wide and long enough to stretch to the waist. I speak of these today without scruple, but in days past I kept this knowledge absolutely secret. There was another, smaller hairshirt, more convenient to wear beneath his clothes during the daytime.

Sometimes Father was so ill that he was unable to rise. On those occasions he called me to help him recite his breviary or read to him from some book of spirituality. Often he interrupted the readings to ask me, "Do you understand what you are reading?" "I think so."

"Well then, when will you get down to the task of becoming a saint?"

One day I was reading from St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Father stopped me and said, "My son, how far you are away from that!"

Somewhat peeved, I answered, "Father, I 'm reading for you, not for myself."

"Ah," he replied, "you're a bit touchy. So I'm on target. If someday you become a priest, will you preach to others without getting something from your own teaching? What a fine apostle you'll be! Will you dare say to your listeners, 'This is for you, not for me'? What a great preacher I'm preparing for the future!"

In my ministry later I often remembered this reprimand. I can't remember going to the pulpit once without thinking about it.

THE DORMITORY

From Father's room, I am tempted to pass to our dormitory which occupied the same location after the entry of the classes of 1849-50. Here slept fellows destined to become famous: Anatole de Cabrières, Albert de Courtois, Octave de Camaret, Léon Conte, Edgar de Balincourt, Marcel Murjas, Numa Baragnon, Raymond Pansier, Henri Dassas and others. What a fine constellation! A bishop, a senator, a

counselor of Appeals Court, a consul-general, two pastors, a distinguished curate, an artillery colonel, a Dragoon squadron leader, all men of faith and piety.

Those still alive are invited to remember the tiny beds strung out head to foot along three long lines running the length of the dormitory. How often they must have missed the tranquil nights, the peaceful slumber, the carefree awaking in Noah's Ark. Have they forgotten the pink nightshirts everyone had to wear? Mr. Hippolyte, today the venerable Fr. Hippolyte, used to pass from bed to bed checking whether the pink nightshirt did not hide our daytime white undershirt. Today, many alumni have sumptuous rooms with large, soft beds. The College uniform of Prussian-blue tunic and gold-braided cap has now been exchanged for brilliant epaulets and shiny helmet, or for an ermine mantle, or even a golden mitre and embroidered cope. Those who have donned such rich garments as a mark of their rank and dignity must nevertheless follow a road many have trod before them, toward long rows of very narrow beds, and toward very simple and prosaic garb: a casket and a shroud. No bell or drum will awaken them until the dawn of that great day when the trumpet will call. They will come, bishops, colonels, priests, magistrates, before the sovereign Judge. They will give a public and solemn account of the way in which they played their role on the world scene, putting into practice the teachings of the eminent and holy man whose disciples they were.

THE DAZZLING MITRE

I was there but I shall not say where or when. I shall not reveal the identity of the main actor in the scene that I am about to describe. He was a young and worthy priest, very talented, and his future could only be brilliant. Yet he was ambitious and somewhat naive. He had not yet begun to plot and intrigue when he said, "I would like to be a bishop in order to enjoy the fullness of my priesthood eternally."

When he heard this, Fr. d'Alzon's face took on an expression worthy of being painted. It showed astonishment and stupefaction, and signs of an inner struggle between indignation and laughter. At first he was speechless, like a man who does not know what to do or say. Overcoming his surprise he said to the young priest, "My friend, how sharp and subtle, how elevated and profound! Did this come to you

naturally, without effort? It would have taken me quite a while to come up with that! I'll admit, you stopped me in my tracks for a moment.. What an illusion! Open your eyes to see clearly, because if there is a 'fullness of priesthood' in heaven, it is not rash to say that there's one in hell also.

"Where could you ever find a scriptural phrase to justify such a statement? Would it be St. Paul's 'bonum opus desiderat' (1 Tim 3:1 Vulgate)? Doesn't St. John seem to give the true meaning of that expression when he writes, 'their good deeds go with them' (Rev.14: 13)? That's what you should want to rejoice in eternally. It seems to me that in heaven the fullness of good works is more important than the fullness of the priesthood. Don't you agree? And the practice of humility is included in those good works. When it comes to high positions and dignities in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ here on earth, I think we have to leave that up to the King himself, without forcing the hand of his ministers who distribute such posts. Otherwise one risks having only the trappings of the episcopacy; and the sacred character, usurped or forced, lies on a bad conscience. You know your Bible too well not to have noticed the expression of a famous bishop, 'No one takes this honor on himself, but each one is called by God...' (Heb. 5:4). Ambitious men, having worn the mitre for a couple of weeks and having looked at themselves in the mirror, realize very rapidly that an archbishop is a bit more than a bishop, and a cardinal even more so. Then anxiety begins. One starts to plot, honestly whenever possible.

"One deceives himself by attempting to stretch his conscience to adapt to the situation. . .but in the long run he succeeds. Finally, when one can no longer desire anything because he has already obtained everything, and because ambition continues to burn bright, one turns inward upon himself. He is unhappy, unsteady, crotchety, intolerable to live with. Death comes along. The Judge comes...and mitres and fancy hats are useless if there were no good works. The text, 'their good deeds go with them' mentions neither mitres nor other kinds of hats. One goes to God naked, with only one's works. My fine friend, let things ride; don't try to climb higher. A bishop who created many other bishops, Bishop de Frayssinous, once wrote to Count d'Estourmel, 'A crown on one's head is a thorn in one's heart.' I'm not speaking now of ambitious

people like Nestorius or Photius.”

This is Father in one of his best moments, when the depths of his soul were revealed. The priest he spoke to never became a bishop. I’m not the fellow in question either!

Am I wrong in recounting such things which might seem confidential? I feel safe because I’m writing exclusively for the *Souvenirs*.⁵ If you continue to be discreet I may be bold enough to reveal things you have no inkling of. As I finish this *sketch*, the following idea popped into my head: Years ago, when I had just been named honorary canon, I wrote to Fr. d’Alzon at Valbonne, “I have become an honorary canon.” By return mail he answered, “Become a saint. That’s worth more and will be more advantageous for you.”

FATHER D’ALZON AND THE NEAR EAST

A poet from the Near East once wrote to a European, “Come...your shadow shall be great beneath the Oriental sun.” Fr. d’Alzon went to the Near East. His shadow covered and made fruitful these lands of immortal memories. His action is continued by the ministry of his sons. He came, and his shadow grows ever greater under Eastern skies.

When he returned from his voyage, I asked Father, “How did you manage to go to Constantinople without pushing on to Jerusalem?” “Rest assured, some day we shall go to the Holy Places.” That was his response, and I draw your attention to his word “we” which he emphasized, probably intentionally. We can never forget his words spoken at the year-end ceremonies of the College, presided by Bp. Plantier, on August 1, 1862. Fr. Joseph Maubon has quoted them in his fine Golden Jubilee speech, but I repeat them here because they are still very pertinent: “In Rome, I heard the Sovereign Pontiff bless what he called our ‘works in the East and in the West.’ The inexpressible feeling I had then was surpassed a few hours later when I was summoned to a private audience with the Pope, which I would never have dared request, given the Holy Father’s immense burden of work. The Pope spoke to me about the Near East. What went on during these precious instants that were granted to me, I cannot reveal, out of respect, as you well

⁵ The intra-congregation publication in which some of the *Sketches* were initially published.

understand. But I left with the right, I might almost say the mission, to study the grave question of the return to the faith of these peoples and to seek, with the help of eminent personalities, the best means of effectuating this return.”

These are his own words. Can we find a more frank, clear, yet reserved statement? Do you know what effect these words had, especially among the clergy? Some said, “Fr. d’Alzon is off again, carried away by his imagination!” Others said, “He considers as a papal order a simple phrase uttered without any such formal intention!” Still others, “What folly! To believe that he can conquer the whole Near East with the four or five monks he has in his Order!”

Is that all? No. Even friends murmured, “What a pity! He’s always jumping into all sorts of unusual things. It’s sad to see him waste his time and his resources.” I am repeating, not what some one else said he heard, but only what I heard myself.

Let’s pass from 1862 to 1895. We see his great shadow under Near Eastern skies, with the blessings of two Popes, Pius IX and Leo XIII. How the shadow has spread! What vast areas it covers! How many are the souls that seek and find salvation beneath it! What was folly in the eyes of men has in fact proved that it was the Spirit of Wisdom that impelled Father. The discretion of Father’s expression has of course, been noted. “What went on during these precious instants...I cannot reveal.”

Just once was the corner of the veil of discretion lifted for me, a tiny bit. One evening Father and I were seated on a stone bench...on the spot where, I believe, the statue of Father now stands. Father spoke enthusiastically about the Near East. He expounded the history of the late Roman Empire, of Russia, of the Ottoman Empire so clearly that the past seemed to become a living drama. What a great power of synthesis he had. His immense knowledge, speculative and practical alike, turned toward grave ideas but was also expert in seeing practical applications. He said, “God sent the Crusaders to the East to establish, not their kingdom, but his own, as the Pope had told them. In the long run, they became corrupt and forgot their mission. Now everything needs to be done again! We need crusades of zeal, prayer, and sacrifice. That’s what Pius IX demands.

“Would you believe that Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Propaganda, initially opposed my mission to Bulgaria and the Near East? He told me he would fight the project, in such emphatic terms that I felt I must talk to the Pope about it. Immediately the Holy Father answered, ‘Ah! Barnabo doesn’t want it. *Ma se io dico ché lo voglio?* But if I say that I do want it?’

“I asked if I might be allowed to report the Pope’s words to the cardinal. He kindly granted permission. I went to the Prefect of the Propaganda who told me, ‘My policy is this: I study a question conscientiously and present my views to the Pope. Once the Head of the Church has given his decision, I adopt his position. His point of view becomes mine, with no hesitation on my part.’”

To Fr. d’Alzon’s words I might add that Cardinal Barnabo’s conduct proves the admirable spirit of these true ministers of the Church and of the Supreme Pontiff. Haven’t we found the same attitude in Cardinal Ledochowski, Prefect of the Propaganda in 1895, and in all the Roman prelates who have dealt with Fr. Picard concerning the Near East?

I conclude with Fr. Emmanuel’s (Bailly) phrase, “How pleased Fr. d’Alzon would have been to hear the cardinals tell Fr. Picard that the Pope counted a great deal upon the Assumptionists for the union of the Churches...!” Father would not have been surprised. He knew Peter had spoken and that Peter keeps his word, whether he speaks through Pius IX, Leo XIII, or any Pope.⁶

A CHASUBLE WITH “VEGETABLE” DECORATIONS

An old pastor in Lunel had received as a gift an antique silk robe, rococo in style. The design was super-showy: large yellow flowers on a violet background. He got the idea of using the material for a chasuble. His niece, who had recently left the convent, undertook the task and didn’t succeed too well. If the cut of the garment was not graceful, at least the stitching was solid.

The good pastor, proud of his vestment, never missed a chance to wear it whenever the rubrics permitted. It was said that from Septuagesima Sunday until Easter and all during Advent he chanted the

⁶ This *sketch* is one of the rare ones dated, “Jerusalem, on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, 1895.”

High Mass himself, clad in his motley chasuble. The curates, of course, wore only simple dalmatics of plain purple.

Fr. d'Alzon visited there one day, and the masterpiece had to be exhibited, along with the modest niece who had made it. "What do you think?" asked the pastor. "I want to be buried in this chasuble when the time comes."

"My dear Father," answered Fr. d'Alzon laughing, "don't wait until you die. Bury this thing as soon as possible." "What!"

"It's the most atrocious mixture of un-peeled egg-plants and slices of squash that an artist of poor taste ever concocted. If you're buried in this, the cemetery will become a vegetable garden."

Do you know who told me this story? The pastor himself, after he had become titular canon of the cathedral where I was curate. He added, "Fr. d'Alzon is a learned man, but everyone knows that he lacks taste."

I saw the old canon in his casket, vested with the famous chasuble. The verses of my *Dies Irae* became, I must admit, a medley of prayers and visions of egg-plants and squashes. It was involuntary, but inevitable.

TRANSITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

The title of this *sketch* will become clear to readers and to the writer himself — at least I hope so — as the narration proceeds. As I begin, I have no predetermined plan, but my head is crammed with souvenirs that are not yet organized. Bit by bit, they will probably fall into some kind of chronological order. My aim is to show by what transitions and transformations Fr. d'Alzon advanced, without ever retreating a single step, toward religious life, perfecting himself in the ways of holiness. At the same time, I shall mention the origins and development of his congregation, because Fr. d'Alzon and his religious family are inseparable in what I call their "evolution."

If I'm not mistaken, it was in 1842 that I saw Fr. d'Alzon for the first time. He was preaching an Advent series in the church of St. Baudile, in Nîmes. Every evening, he met only with the men. My friends and I had the idea of going to listen to him, because he, his sermons, and their success were much spoken of. The men had filled the church long before the ceremony was due to begin. When my friends and I arrived, there

was no more room. But kids somehow find a way. We worked our way into a chapel opposite the pulpit and found ourselves very well placed.

Finally Fr. d'Alzon appeared in the pulpit and we fixed our gaze upon him. He wore a canon's cowl and held his biretta in his left hand. He was thirty-two at the time. He held his head proudly. His long black hair was slightly curly. He seemed very tall and majestic.

Solemnly he made the sign of the Cross and began to speak in a strong voice. I have no notes of this talk and I was too young to remember all its content. I had not come for the sermon itself but only to see the Fr. d'Alzon that everyone was talking about. Still, I remember that he spoke forcefully and wittily about human respect. After having repeated in his own manner the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, he pretended to find among his audience certain characters whom he addressed thus: "Ah, my friend, you're afraid to show openly that you're a Christian and a Catholic! Do you know what you are? A Nicodemus! A great big Nicodemus! Follow the Nicodemus of the Gospel in his conversion and in his courage, or else, as you pass by, the kids will point at you and say, 'That guy, he's a great big Nicodemus.'"

The popular preacher, the man of good works, the zealous confessor of working-men and servant-girls, the brilliant vicar-general soon took a giant step. In late 1844, he became headmaster of Assumption College, without having abandoned a single one of his many ministries. He became a vigilant Master, tempering firmness with fatherly love. He loved his children and they adored him. He cared for them day and night. Often, in the middle of the night, we'd see him walking in the dorms, clad in a long robe of white wool, carrying a little lantern. He blessed the sleeping children and had a word for those who were still awake. We'd got into the habit of sticking a tiny piece of paper on our foreheads, with the words, "Father, wake me up," if we wanted to speak to him. He'd listen kindly to what we had to say, and answered us with words that touched our hearts. Then he'd make a tiny cross on our foreheads with his thumb. Some students asked to be awakened just to get the blessing.

As soon as he was installed at the College Father began to adopt certain religious customs. It's then that he chose the poor cell that I've already described. His regularity and punctuality were proverbial. He

attended the offices in the cathedral but always returned in time to preside in the College chapel. During Christmas night for instance, he was at Matins and Lauds in St. Castor, and at midnight began the Mass at Assumption.

My readers must now let me speak frankly, without holding anything back, because after all I am giving my impressions and souvenirs. I don't know exactly why, but as soon as I entered the College Father seemed to take a special liking to me. As a result, I was able to follow him closely and observe him very attentively. He was like no one else. In my eyes, he was the ideal, perfection itself. I'll say it clearly: I raved about him!

I noted that he collected Rule books and Constitutions of all the religious Orders. He read most often the Constitutions of the Benedictines, the Dominicans, and the Augustinians. Later, I found out that he "did not want to establish new rules, but rather to graft his Congregation onto a vigorous old trunk, like a young branch which, helped by life-giving sap, will bear blossoms and fruit of a new kind." These are Father's own words. We know that the trunk he chose was that of St. Augustine. We have only to open our eyes to see the splendor of the young graft. Once he had made his choice, after long prayers and bloody mortifications, he began to seek disciples.

His first step in this direction was when in 1846 he gathered a few chosen teachers in his office. He told them of his plan to found a teaching congregation and said that the plans were still incomplete and that the constitutions were being studied. He wanted to know if any of them might be interested in helping him, in the event that a congregation was indeed founded.

With Fr. d'Alzon were Fathers Tissot, Henri and Surel; and two tonsured clerics, Fournéry and Blanchet. When they responded affirmatively, Father rose and knelt before each to kiss his feet. In my opinion, this was the very first step toward the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption. It was a trial balloon. Fathers Henri and Surel died as pastors. Fournéry died of an aneurysm one night, in our dormitory. Fr. Blanchet, tonsured at 35, was finally ordained and left for the Iroquois missions, where he died.

During the same period, Father founded a religious society for the lay

professors, with Jules Monnier, Victor Cardenne and two or three others. He also set his sights on a couple students — very different from each other — Anatole de Cabrières and Henri-Dieudonné Galeran. Not immediately, but after a short while, the clergymen gathered during the night to recite office, on the eve of the feasts of the Blessed Virgin. They used the Roman proper. The laymen recited the office of “The Grandeurs of Jesus.” Victor Cardenne used to recite with the clerics. The two youngsters followed a special rule. For instance, when general permission was granted for an outing, they had to ask special authorization from Fr. d’Alzon, as their spiritual superior.

To each member of the fledgling societies, Father gave a magnificent crucifix of enameled black iron. Later these iron crucifixes were suppressed because they could not be indulged, but they were replaced by others. Little by little the number of disciples increased, and we arrive at the moment when Father received at the College those destined to be his faithful co-workers and the real founding members of the Assumptionists: Hippolyte Saugrain, Henri Brun, and Etienne Pernet. I can still see them as they arrived, separately, at the College.

Hippolyte bounded in one step from the College entrance to the center of the courtyard. His footsteps were gigantic. Each movement revealed that his limbs were of steel and that there was quicksilver in his blood. His face was ruddy and his eyes were mischievous. He wore a black top hat and a dark coat. His brown trousers had long black vertical stripes. How do I remember such details? I’m copying them from my diary. Why did I note such details? Who knows! But don’t such details make you see our revered Fr. Hippolyte as he began his transformation? He was our general monitor.

Fr. Henri Brun, from Langogne, came to us from Mende. Timid, awkward, he was wrapped in a cloak edged with astrakhan. His blond hair fell very straight. His voice quavered. His exterior didn’t reveal the treasure hidden in the heart of this priest who later became a really holy religious. He was named prefect of discipline to replace Fr. Henri.

Etienne Pernet came from Franche-Comte. He was mild, sympathetic, and quite timid. He wore a beard and snuffed. He had on a long reddish-brown coat. He became the monitor of the first division students, including François Picard, Paul de Pèlerin, and me.

What change took place in these three men as they became Fathers Brun, Saugrain, and Pernet! With Victor Cardenne they were the first Assumptionists. In 1850, these chosen men signed and gave to Fr. d'Alzon a formal promise to accept whatever rules Rome would eventually approve. As a priest, Fr. Brun signed first; then Cardenne, Saugrain and Pernet appended their names. This promise has been published in the *Souvenirs*. It is really the first vows of Assumption, for as we know, public vows were pronounced only in 1851, at the Christmas Midnight Mass.⁷

I shall not mention here my dear and beloved Fr. Laurent because I plan to devote a separate *Sketch* to the four assistants. But, lest I forget it, I mention here that when Fr. Laurent joined the congregation the priests of the diocese of Nîmes said, "If Fr. Laurent is joining Fr. d'Alzon, this congregation must be something very serious."

By 1851, the Congregation of the Augustinians of the Assumption was definitely founded. Successive transformations in founder and disciples alike had led to this splendid result. In thought, I return to those years, in order to appreciate the strength of character of Father, his perseverance despite so much opposition, his admirable spiritual progress. I thank God that I was permitted to witness these marvelous developments.

I followed Father from 1842 until 1880, and in a much closer fashion between 1842 and 1850. From 1850 until 1880 we kept in touch by an uninterrupted exchange of letters, and I've always rejoiced in the contact with this great soul, who did me so much good.

I am also an old witness to the first transitions, and I'm greatly pleased to see, grafted on the ancient trunk of St. Augustine, this fine branch, which transforms the ancient sap into strong branches, brilliant flowers, and abundant fruits of holiness.

FATHER DIVESTS A TRAVELER

One September morning in 1859, at dawn, I saw the stage coach from Montagnac stop at my door in Montpellier. A lively traveler jumped out;

⁷ Translator's note: Canon Galeran's terminology and dating are misleading here. Fr. d'Alzon and his first four disciples pronounced public vows for one year at Christmas, 1850. A year later they pronounced perpetual vows.

it was Fr. d'Alzon. He was coming from Lavagnac and wanted to say Mass before getting the train for Nîmes. Later, as we breakfasted together, Fr. d'Alzon asked, "Could you come to Nîmes with me?"

"Yes, as long as I can return this evening. Why do you want me to come along?"

"I need an accomplice."

"An accomplice? For some dirty deed?"

"To divest a traveler in a car of the express train."

I realized then that he was planning some kind of trick.

"Father, are you the one who is going to pull this stunt?"

"Yes, and you're to help me if need be."

"But what are you going to take from the traveler? How? Why?"

"His money, of course. If not all, at least a good part of it. And I'll do it by legitimate but somewhat expeditious means, for a good cause. I don't want to miss the nine o'clock train. Let's hurry. Have you decided?"

"Let's go."

As we entered the railroad station, Father revealed his plans: "At Pézenas, I ran into one of my former comrades at Stanislaus College, de V..., who is now a rich landowner in the Hérault. He told me he'd be in Montpellier today and would leave for Marseilles at nine o'clock, after having received some money from his banker. It's a great opportunity to get my friend by the throat."

Fortunately, the three of us were alone in the same compartment. Until Lunel, we spoke of the harvest, business, government, and many other subjects. After Lunel, I noticed that Fr. d'Alzon was getting down to the business of fleecing his friend.

"Tell me, my dear de V..., did you have a good harvest?"

"Yes, thank God."

"Did you sell it at a good price?"

"I sold the wine in vats at the best possible price."

"You must have got a tidy little sum from your banker?"

"A few thousand francs."

“And you’re going to spend them in Marseilles?”

“No. I took the money because in a couple of days I want to return from Marseilles without stopping at Montpellier.”

“Aren’t you afraid of robbers?”

“No.”

“Would you entrust part of your money to me? I’ll invest it at 100%. It will return one hundred for one.”

“That would be a fabulous transaction. But, my dear Emmanuel, you know that you’re not very good at high finance. You know how to spend, but you don’t know how to make money. Your operation is impossible.”

“Impossible? Give me 1,000 francs for your old Father, the Pope.”

“That’s something else. Here you are.” And he passed a thousand-franc note to Fr. d’Alzon who thanked him in these words: “God will repay you, my old friend. And please admit that if I know how to spend money I also know how to make it. Don’t you agree?”

We laughed heartily — all three travelers were satisfied. When we arrived at the College, Father went immediately to the chapel and placed the money on the altar and thanked God. His face showed his gratitude and his joy at having succeeded so promptly and so well. In the cause of good, Father often had such audacity, which one could resist only with great difficulty. His noble and frank way of acting charmed people!

WHAT HE COULD HAVE BEEN, WHAT HE PREFERRED TO BE

When Jules Simon was Minister,⁸ he said one day, “Father d’Alzon is my enemy because he has always fought the University. Still, I admire his fine character and I want to make him a bishop.” When Fr. d’Alzon learned of the Minister’s intentions, he cried out, “Me, a bishop! No! Never! I vowed never to accept the episcopate.”

That’s Fr. d’Alzon’s entire life: men wanted to elevate him and he sought only to be humble and obscure. State and Church vied to heap honors and dignities upon him. He resisted, in order to live and die as a simple priest, in his monk’s garb.

⁸ François-Jules Simon-Suisse was the Minister of Public Education, and in 1876 became Prime Minister.

To what heights could he not have risen if he had consented to bow before Louis-Napoleon? At one time, he held the University sceptre, as a member of the Superior Council of Public Education. He didn't hesitate to sacrifice even that position ...rather than accept the Cross of the Legion of Honor at the hands of the Prince-President. Several governments tried to attach him to themselves by obtaining a mitre for him. At least five times he had a chance to "have a throne in an illustrious church," but he always refused the advances of the men in power.

Bishop Besson tells us that Pius IX "loved his integrity, his simplicity, his courage, and his magnanimous disinterestedness." It has been said that the Pope thought of "calling him to Rome and making him a member of the Sacred College." In this regard, I can say that in 1861, when I had dealings with the Sovereign Pontiff, I became acquainted with several cardinals and prelates, among them Cardinal Antonelli and Cardinal Villecourt, Archbishop Franchi of Salonika, and Bishop de Merode. From several conversations with the last three of these, I had to conclude that the Pope wanted Fr. d'Alzon to be a cardinal residing in Rome. When I returned to France, I tried to sound out Father on this subject. My only success, which I wasn't seeking at all, was a severe reprimand, the worst he ever gave me, he who never missed any of the many chances I gave him to chastise me. I am convinced that Father had been astute enough to refuse the scarlet during some private audience, somewhat as St. Philip Neri had done with Gregory XIII and Clement VIM. But we'll never really know. The secret is lost.

What would have been Emmanuel d'Alzon's destiny if he had remained a good Christian layman? It is not hard to imagine that his future would have been brilliant. He had exceptional natural gifts, combined as they rarely are in a single individual. Intelligent, kind-hearted, proud and noble in bearing, pleasant in his conversation, which was nourished by his deep and broad knowledge, he made a deep impression on everyone he dealt with. His aristocratic air, his handsome person, his dignified carriage which did not exclude a bit of agreeable familiarity, his generosity and his exquisite tact endeared him to all. Add to that his noble ancestry — he was of the race of the Montcalm and the

Assas — and the expectation of inheriting a fortune of more than six million, without counting immense landholdings and the family château at Lavagnac.

In the ecclesiastical state, as a secular priest, with his name, fortune, and marvelous personal qualities, he would have had an enormous influence. We have only to consider the years between his ordination on December 26, 1834 and 1850. Already in 1835 Bp. Chaffoy of Nîmes offered to make him a titular canon. When he refused, the bishop named him honorary vicar-general. So, at 25, one year after ordination, Fr. d'Alzon was vicar-general. Soon he became honorary canon, not only of Nîmes, but of Montpellier, Lyons, and other dioceses. At first, such honors astonished the clergy, but people soon understood that Fr. d'Alzon, who was already an outstanding orator and eminent priest despite his youth, was a superior man destined for even the highest dignities.

Fr. Maurice de Bonald, a relative of Fr. d'Alzon, had become bishop of Puy at 27. True, his father was a royal minister. But Viscount d'Alzon was powerful in Paris too, not only under Charles X but even under Louis-Philippe. I have read letters that prove that it was due to the influence of Viscount d'Alzon that Fr. Coustou, vicar-general of Montpellier, was named bishop of Grenoble, although that worthy priest refused the honor. The Viscount was also responsible for the nomination of Bp. Thibault to the see of Montpellier. He was aided in this by Madame Elisabeth, sister of King Louis-Philippe, because the princess, like Viscount d'Alzon, desired to eliminate Fr. Lecourtier, who nonetheless, under the Empire, succeeded Bp. Thibault. The King had considered both candidates, and everyone was looking for the bishop who could do the most good for Montpellier after Bp. Fournier.

Couldn't Viscount d'Alzon, helped by powerful friends and influential relatives, have obtained an episcopal see for his son? Didn't this son, who had helped other distinguished priests to the episcopate and prevented others whom he judged incapable, have the power to choose a cathedral for himself? Did he not have, to an eminent degree, the qualities and virtues needed in a bishop, a great bishop? Did he not attract the attention of all when he participated as a chaplain in the consecration of his pupil, Bishop de Cabrières?

What did Father choose instead? What did he prefer to the legitimate honors he was so worthy of having? He became a monk. Instead of a mitre, he chose the cowl. He chose somber religious garb rather than episcopal purple. Far from seeking men's praise, he allowed himself to be called an original, extravagant, foolish. He, who had governed a diocese under three bishops, saw himself rejected during a vacancy of the see and deprived of all administrative authority. He retreated to private life with the calm majesty of a sun which sets only to rise again. A bishop of Nîmes was almost forced, prior to his consecration, to dismiss Father from the bishop's council. The bishop, an intelligent man with a lot of common sense, resisted the pressure. Who had tried to exert the pressure? A primate, related to Fr. d'Alzon, who feared the ardor and enterprise of the vicar-general of Nîmes.

Father was opposed in every one of his undertakings. Some said that his works succeeded only because of his name and his fortune and predicted that they would crumble once he was gone. But he took note of everything, heard everything without ever deviating from his objective. Some tried to cause rifts among his first disciples, male and female. Some tried to create and develop among his female helpers feelings of ingratitude, which contributed to shortening Father's life. Despite his natural pride and his spirit of sacrifice and detachment, Father was an extremely sensitive man. Usually he didn't let the sufferings of his soul show in public, but in private he bore an immense burden of trials.

If only the cell in the Chartreuse at Valbonne, where Fr. d'Alzon often stayed, ever revealed its secrets, we would find blood and tears, testimony of long and painful agonies. I know what I am talking about, because Father often wrote to me from this retreat. The last letter he ever wrote to me, shortly before his death, was sent from Valbonne, and it bore traces of tears.

I have mentioned what our Master might have aspired to and what he preferred instead. I have given only a rapid outline, because I am not Father's biographer. All I want to do is reveal to his sons who never knew him what I personally observed during what I call his period of transformation, i.e. his passage from secular priest to religious priest.

It was in 1846 that I read in his soul for the first time. I was then only

a child, but as I heard him preach for the profession of a religious, I was deeply impressed by his sermon. Of course I didn't understand all of it and needed the explanation of a highly intelligent comrade. Then I jotted down what I had heard, and may yet use it in some *sketch*.

BOLD BUT FRANK

It has often been said that in conversation and even in preaching Father used bold, almost crude, language. Perhaps, he was a bit too free-spoken. Bishop Besson says the same thing, but more diplomatically, in his funeral oration for Fr. d'Alzon: "Sometimes he was too familiar, but he was always able to rise above that." Frankly, the rising sometimes took a bit of time, but people forgave Fr. d'Alzon much, and he never lost his prestige even when hundreds of others would have taken a nose-dive. His speech may have astonished some, but it never shocked people, who knew the nobility of his soul and the purity of his heart.

May I give my impression? When he needed to speak about delicate matters, he seemed like a man who suddenly discovers a poisonous snake hissing in his path. Rather than flee, he would grab it bravely by the tail, swing it in the air, and fling it boldly above the heads of his startled audience. His actions were noted with some uneasiness, but finally no one was hurt by the dangerous sting, neither the brave man nor those who watched. Father d'Alzon called things by their rightful names, in order to dispose of them more rapidly.

PORTRAIT OF A FOUNDER

Here's an extract from a sermon preached by Father in 1847, which I noted down at the time. I find the same passage in another notebook dated 1857, but with a text by St. Thomas, which I probably could not remember in 1847. The passage deals with St. Norbert of Magdeburg.

"What is a founder? When God wants to produce a founder, he chooses a man and works upon him as he did upon the patriarchs. He prepares him, he fills him with his spirit, he gives him a clear intuition of his will and of the mission which he must fulfill.

"To do this, he inflames his heart and strengthens his will by directing it toward an objective which may at first be somewhat vague but which bit by bit will be lit by supernatural light.

“God adds wisdom, holiness, and paternity. Wisdom, for the choice of means, the writing of rules and regulations; holiness, so that he may be an example for his flock; paternity or fecundity, so that numerous sons may cooperate in his work and perpetuate it.

“To act and perpetuate oneself is the mark of a higher mission. It is the real mark of the founder. The Divine Master said to his disciples, “Whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works” (Jn 14:12).

“That’s why St. Thomas establishes the principle, ‘It is not the mark of a lesser power, but of a higher power, to do something by means of others rather than do it oneself’ (III,q.xlii,art.1, ad 2 um).

“God saved the world by his Son, with the cooperation of the Immaculate Virgin. The Son perpetuates the work by the Apostles and their successors in the Church. The special, extraordinary missions entrusted to the founders of Orders are continued by their disciples, always in the Church, always under the authority of the Supreme Pastor...”

PROMPT AND SHARP RESPONSE

Fr. d’Alzon did not like to be contradicted. He was naturally caustic and impatient, and a biting word was always just on the tip of his tongue. His eyes blazed before he spoke, and this was the lightning before the thunder. He must have made heroic efforts to master his fiery temperament, before he finally became a model of patience in adversity!

In 1860, I attended a reunion of priests presided by Fr. d’Alzon. Father spoke at length, but, strangely, not well. He lacked gusto, method, and clarity. He never got to the point but wandered all over the subject. Unfortunately I gave in to a bad habit for which I had often been reprimanded, and I interrupted Father, saying, “You really should be somewhat more precise.” He turned suddenly and glared at me. “You want greater precision,” he said, sitting bolt upright in his chair. “It is with great precision that I say that you are impolite, improper, and pretentious to dare interrupt, you, the youngest one here while your elders and betters remain silent.”

What a stinging blow! I shrank into myself, shriveling like a wineskin in the cold, but it was because of the heat, not the cold. And in final

analysis the interruption proved useful because I had put the speaker back on the track, with steam in his boiler. Father continued his talk, but now approached the question from the right direction and drew a clear conclusion. He admitted it himself later on, with a charming laugh. Yet he never regretted having laid me out flat, in front of everyone.

A VERY SPECIAL SERMON

At the funeral service for the dead fallen at Castelfidardo, Fr. d'Alzon entered the pulpit of the Nîmes cathedral vested with the chasuble and all the priestly vestments. Someone who was present reports some of what he said on that occasion.

“Undoubtedly you are surprised to see me here vested with all the vestments used at Mass. In such an exceptional service as this, held in honor of the victims of the guiltiest of all betrayals, I thought that I might break with liturgical customs. The vestments I wear are symbolic, and such symbolism, given recent events, seems particularly appropriate.

“Enemies of the Papacy have slain its heroic defenders. Christ's Vicar is delivered up to the most vile, most base of men. The painful scenes of the Passion are repeated: derision, insults, thorns, the scarlet robe, the blindfold, bound hands. All reappear in one way or another in the shameful treatment inflicted upon the Sovereign Pontiff.

“People want to put an end to Catholicism! But neither the Pope nor the Church will be done away with any more than Our Lord was done away with, despite every effort. Do you want to know why? Consider the immense army, covering the entire globe, of which the Pope is the leader. Consider the Catholic priesthood, from the Roman Pontiff to the lowliest priest, vesting each day and going up to the altar with this powerful armor, symbol of an invincible moral power.

“The amice is the helmet whose splendor will paralyze all diabolical efforts. The alb, its whiteness coming from the Blood of the Lamb, the blood which purifies consciences, gives purity and fortifies the will. The cincture mysteriously girds our loins and symbolizes the strength that comes from chastity and the victory over our passions. The maniple of tears and penance guarantees the victory of those who know how to pray and suffer. The stole is the symbol of immortality. Those who fight for

God will, after trials, be filled with joy. The chasuble is the burden of the Lord, a burden which becomes lighter and sweeter if we bear it willingly. It is an honorable burden which calls forth an abundance of grace, of supernatural help which makes heroes and victors.

“The Church, you see, is well armed. No one can deprive it of its armor. Its children may be killed, assassinated...but there remain many more! Look up and you will see these heroes covered with their wounds, surrounding the Throne of the Lamb. They now live with a life they can never lose, clad in a protective power against which cannot prevail the impious, apostates, hypocrites, or assassins.”

I was not present; I quote the orator's words as I received them.

LAMENNAIS, VENTURA, D'ALZON

Here is a group of three remarkable men who are very much unlike each other. Their characters differ; their life style is far from being the same. Yet they met and their relations were frequent and cordial. They esteemed and loved each other despite the fact that they differed in opinions and conduct.

I am most concerned with Fr. d'Alzon, and it is his fine image which must be fully shown. That's why Lamennais and Ventura will be compared to him, as in a picture where the main motif is surrounded by others which serve to put it into greater prominence. The men will be considered in the chronological order of their death: 1854, 1861, 1880.

The first (Lamennais), after having shone with a brilliance which Leo XII called “the light of the last Father of the Church,” was impelled by overweening pride and plunged from downfall to downfall, and he soon saw the fires of his glory extinguished in the darkness of his obstinate revolt.

The second was briefly dazzled by his popularity and had the misfortune of openly opposing the policies of his king, Pius IX. He was forced to leave Rome and the States of the Church. Still this famous Theatine priest never erred in matters of faith. The ardor of his Sicilian blood may have caused him to blame the government of his prince, but he always stayed faithful to the Sovereign Pontiff, head of the Church. He died as a good priest, in Versailles. On his deathbed he rose to embrace a bishop who was standing at his bedside and he said,

“Excellency, in you I embrace the Church!”

The third, our revered Father, remained unshaken in his faith, sure in his doctrine, firm in his devotion, and he never hesitated a moment to serve the Sovereign Pontiff in everything, without wondering where his zeal should stop. His obedience was like that of a child, who never questions the orders of those in authority nor seeks to interpret their actions as he sees fit. Instead, even in matters that had nothing to do with faith, Fr. d’Alzon constantly tried to know the Pope’s desires, assimilate them, and make them his own rules of conduct.

He set aside his own opinions, his own way of seeing things, his ideas about independence, and he signed on his knees a declaration which the Pope desired. His words on that occasion are admirable. “I did not hesitate. I obeyed. The Superior of a Congregation has no other role, once the Pope has spoken. What is a colonel who discusses while a battle is raging? He’s a rebel and deserves to be shot.” Yet the declaration in question was one by which religious congregations submitted to the official acts of the government!

Fr. Ventura retired to Montpellier in France in 1849. He stopped at Assumption College in Nîmes. He didn’t meet Fr. d’Alzon because Father had left for Lavagnac rather than receive personally a priest who had saddened Pius IX. But before leaving, Father had left orders that Fr. Ventura be received with perfect hospitality. The exiled religious lived next to the church of St. Eulalia in Montpellier. He lived alone except for a lay-brother who took care of his modest apartment. I saw him often during vacations, because Fr. d’Alzon had introduced me to him by letters. We often spoke about Rome and he told me some interesting details of Fr. d’Alzon’s stay there.

Fr. Ventura spoke of him with tenderness. He expressed great admiration for his noble character. He told me, “Fr. d’Alzon’s conduct in Rome gained him the esteem of everyone, in all ranks of society. I loved him as soon as I knew him. He was the favorite of Cardinal Micara, Doctor Wiseman, and Fr. Marchi. Pope Gregory XVI had singled him out and had a high opinion of him.

“His brilliant intelligence, his aristocratic manners, his frankness, and his distinguished person, so dignified and sympathetic, made a wonderful impression in Roman circles. He could have been a prelate if

he had wanted. But he was humble and his habits were those of a religious.

“We knew that Lamennais loved him like a son. That’s why Fr. d’Alzon was required, before his ordination, to sign a declaration by which he condemned the errors of his former master.”

A letter by Fr. d’Alzon to his friend and director, Fr. Vernières, confirms the statements above. I once had that letter and sent it, along with others, to Bp. Besson of Nîmes. These documents seem to have been lost. Fortunately, I had had the idea of making copies, and here is what Fr. d’Alzon wrote at the time of his ordination, in December, 1834: “Probably I will be asked, on behalf of the Pope, for an act of submission to the various decrees which condemn Lamennais. Rest assured that I shall not hesitate to sign...”

As long as I’m writing about Lamennais, I would like to add some remarks made by Fr. Ventura during an outing in the woods of La Valette, near Montpellier. “Some members of the Sacred College were too harsh at the outset of the Lamennais affair. I know it. And I said so openly to some prelates who seemed very anxious to get things finished with. Already under Leo XI I there had been some among the cardinals and the upper clergy who found fault with the Pope because he then admired the famous priest. We know that Leo XII had decided to name Lamennais a cardinal. He had reserved him *in petto*.”

Cardinal Wiseman, in his book, *The Four Latest Popes*, also declares that Leo XII had reserved Lamennais *in petto*, and not the historian Lingard, as many, especially among the English, believed.

Fr. Ventura continued, “Leo XII used to say concerning Lamennais that there are two ways of governing men: with a hand held in a heart or by a heart hidden in a hand. That meant, by gentleness with a hint of strength, or by energy with a hint of goodness.”

Fr. d’Alzon understood this way of governing men, as all his disciples can testify.

THE FIRST ASSUMPTIONISTS PLAY BOCCE

The game of bocce is very popular in southern France, especially around Nîmes. Whoever wants to make a profound study of the customs and mentality of the people of Nîmes has only to walk along the

“viaduct” and take note of players and spectators alike. Obviously the game interests the players, but the spectators are also fanatical. They know the names of all the players and the skill of each lobber and aimer. In doubtful cases, the gallery is the referee and its decisions brook no appeal. A good shot or a ball well aimed deserves applause. Clumsy players, especially newcomers, are made fun of and mercilessly teased.

The fact is, the gallery of spectators is supreme: it allows itself to be noisy if it so inclined. It is sometimes insolent and provokes quarrels and the exchange of a few good punches. Then it again becomes wiser and calmer, re-establishes peace, and the game can continue merrily. It is also fascinating to note how the spectators follow the ball once it is thrown. They are silent but their hearts throb. Their body movements imitate those of the ball as it rolls, left or right, toward its target. When it stops, people straighten up and tongues begin to wag, approvingly for a good shot, mockingly for a poor one.

Assumption had its origins in Nîmes; therefore Assumption had its bocce court. When they were still only a few religious, they played in the yard where the swimming pool now is, on the other side of the viaduct. After dinner and the *Miserere*, Fr. d’Alzon, followed by his tiny band, would head for the battle-ground. Like all Assumptionists they walked rapidly; they grabbed the balls and started the game. I won’t name all those who were there. Some, very successful at bocce, failed in the more serious aspects of religious life. They aimed poorly and ended up far outside the court. The gallery has lost sight of them.

Fr. d’Alzon was a lobber, and he lobbed so hard that his ball sometimes smashed the ball on which it fell. According to some experts, Father had a big advantage: he lobbed left-handed. Fr. Hippolyte was a terrible player. Who wouldn’t have guessed it? How could it be otherwise?

Victor Cardenne, with his tiny blue marten’s eyes, whose field of vision seemed guided by a nose that looked like the prow of a ship, was the best aimer. Whoever was on his team was sure to win. But he played only in the beginning, because illness and death soon stole him away from his brothers.

Fr. Tissot was an aimer. He had a system (he was from Lyons, not Nîmes). He aimed scientifically, according to all the rules which he had

pondered deeply. That's why he always missed his shot. Fr. Brun was brave. As soon as he raised his ball, even before he aimed, you'd have thought that he was absolutely sure of himself. He believed it too, so much so that when he missed a shot, as he invariably did, he could never understand why. Either it had rained, or the earth was too dry, or the court had somehow changed since the last game. It was never his fault. He was a hopeful aimer and he had a future. Many of his former pupils say that he became a strong player.

DANCING, FENCING, AND INTOXICATION

What an extraordinary title, when it concerns Fr. d'Alzon! What does it mean? I'll tell you, if you try to follow me step by step, reserving your judgment. In heraldry, whenever a coat-of-arms is formed contrary to rules ... we have to inquire into the historical reasons for the deviation. In this case we need to inquire also.

The son of Viscount d'Alzon, heir to a famous name and a considerable fortune, had to be educated as completely as possible, that he might shine in high society. While he was studying, he was also given the best tutors in the social arts which were compatible with his tastes and aptitudes.

One day when he was in a very relaxed mood Father told me how he 1) took dancing lessons, 2) learned fencing, 3) became intoxicated, along with Mr. de Tessan and Mr. de la Bouillierie. To satisfy impatient readers, I'll deal with the third case first. Intoxication is not exactly a social art, and if I treat of it here it's because I'd be ashamed to speak of it elsewhere. I repeat: intoxication, with two friends, one of whom became canon and vicar-general and the other became Bishop of Carcassone and later Archbishop of Bordeaux. They got drunk...with a pitcher of ice-water. Here's how: the three young students had hiked to Versailles one day. Exhausted, bathed in sweat, horribly thirsty, they stopped outside a boulevard cafe. They imprudently ordered three vanilla ice-creams and a pitcher of ice-water. Unwisely each guzzled a full glass of water. The effect was immediate. They became so drunk that they couldn't stand or sit, and they began to ramble incoherently. A doctor was called. As soon as he had arrived, he noticed the empty pitcher and guessed what had happened. He soon sobered up the three youths. "Would you believe," asked Fr. d'Alzon, "that as soon as we had

regained our senses we clamored for ... what? Our vanilla ice-cream. The prudent doctor had had them removed. He prescribed a small shot of brandy and brought us back to our lodging himself.” Nothing in this episode could scandalize even a novice. But it can teach us a lesson, which I shall mention as I finish my narration.

Fencing lessons had as their object not fighting but rather strength and suppleness of limb, like gymnastics. Dancing was supposed to teach young Emmanuel to be graceful, springy, dignified yet free in his movements. During the first lessons, the dancing-master required that his pupils wear shoes with leaden soles. According to this teacher, after practicing with such shoes, one felt as bouncy as a rubber ball when one changed to light dancing slippers.

Dancing had little effect upon young Emmanuel. He would have preferred military training with some old drill sergeant. His bearing, his gait was something uniquely his own. But up to a point he profited from his dancing lessons, because we find him taking part in a dance held by the Lavagnac servants. He wrote to a friend, “To be sure, the grandest ball at the Opera or elsewhere was not the equal of the one held here tonight, the day before Mardi Gras, in the servants’ dining hall. As musicians we had only a mountaineer and his tipple flute, but we had legs for dancing and we used them as best we could.”

Concerning fencing, the use of weapons suited Emmanuel d’Alzon very well. On the day when he hung up his foils, gloves, mask, and plastron, he took up another kind of sword which he would never lay down. All his life he was an intrepid warrior, a fighter who never rested in the struggle to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

When bishops die, their pastoral staff is placed beside them on their bier. When Father died, I would have liked to see him laid out with his left hand holding a crucifix to his breast and his right hand placed on the hilt of a naked sword. After his funeral, I would have placed the sword in the hands of his successor as the most eloquent symbol of his investiture.

The Assumptionist sword, brandished by their General or even by a simple monk, has never ceased to do battle. It has no scabbard because it needs none, as it is constantly at work against the enemies of God, the Church, and the nation. It is not a slim, pointed rapier like the stinger of

a wasp. It is rather a big, heavy, two-handed broadsword, like that of the ancient crusaders. It is a noble and powerful blade. Its hilt is a cross and its steel cuts *ad divisionem animae et spiritus*. It's a terrible weapon which the brave sons of d'Alzon handle expertly, to the battle cry feared by Hell: Thy Kingdom Come!

From these episodes, we can conclude:

- 1) avoid drinking ice-water, especially when we are overheated. Know how to wait, in a spirit of mortification, the proper time to refresh ourselves, without sensuality and without danger. In patience we will possess our body and our health.
- 2) If we haven't had dancing lessons, know how to get along without them, convinced that if we know and watch ourselves we will be able to remain dignified, even distinguished, without affectation. Religious orders have regulations more valuable than dancing or fencing lessons; they are called rules of modesty.
- 3) Let us imitate our Father's bravery and daring. Let our souls be tempered by his chivalrous spirit. Like him, let us be without fear and without reproach, and we will be deemed worthy of fighting the Lord's battles.

CONFESSOR

Bishop de Cabrières had this to say about Fr. d'Alzon as confessor: "It was by his paternal action, firm yet gentle, strong yet sweet, tender without being soft, that Fr. d'Alzon won our hearts and urged us to reform and master ourselves. These confessions of years ago were happy ones, and we haven't been able to forget them. No useless chatter, no lengthy exhortations. Only a few brief and penetrating words which stimulated repentance, warded off discouragement, uplifted conscience and gave it serenity."

At Assumption College, almost all the students went to him for confession. There were other priests available and everyone was absolutely free to choose. Still, most, especially among the older students, went to Fr. d'Alzon for confession. Father didn't exercise this kind of ministry only at Assumption College. He had a confessional in

the Nîmes cathedral and heard the confessions of several religious communities. Never did a confessor arrive more punctually nor remain more patiently whenever there was someone to be heard.

He was spiritual director of all kinds of people, from hardened sinners to souls far advanced along the way to holiness. He was a perfect director, well versed in the various ways to perfection. He studied the Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church. He knew the doctrine of the great mystics, among whom St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, and St. Francis de Sales were his favorites.

He heard students' confessions on Saturday evenings during the study period, after the chant of the Litanies of the Virgin Mary and the instructions that he usually gave at that time. He confessed in the organ loft. He would put on a surplice with big, wide sleeves and sit in a corner. We would kneel before him, and he would cover us with a sleeve of the surplice and hear our confession. His remarks after were short and to the point. We couldn't forget what he said. His clear remarks etched themselves in our spirit and became rules for our conduct.

During vacations, many fellows would write to him, seeking direction. He would answer promptly, by short notes we would re-read and preserve. These notes were tiny masterpieces of spirituality. He quoted Scriptures, the Fathers, the writings of the saints. These notes sprang spontaneously from his pen and were not re-worked as were his sermons. He always seemed to have on tap, ready to gush forth whenever needed, many passages from the Fathers and the mystics.

Father's work as confessor and director has often been mentioned elsewhere, but no one has ever given details about his ministry among his own students. The publication of these remarks therefore seems justified.

PREACHER

Despite the title of this *sketch*, I have no pretension of giving a complete picture of Fr. d'Alzon as a preacher. I shall present only a few reminiscences and my personal appreciation. To begin with, I would like to quote from some people who are competent to judge, because they have studied Fr. d'Alzon's thought as well as his style.

Bishop Besson said, "Father d'Alzon's words took on different

aspects, depending on his subject. In his speeches and sermons, he was firm and precise, rich and abundant, bold yet restrained, mingling noble sentiments and lofty thoughts. He was uneven and at times too familiar, but by a single wing-beat was always able to rise again and draw his audience with him even unto the sublime.”

Bishop de Cabrières had this to say about the talks addressed to the students of Assumption College, “The Saturday evening instructions or the Sunday morning assemblies in the exercise hall deeply interested us. The talks were always spontaneous. The range was very great — he went from sublime eloquence to the very bold and familiar. From them sprang forth a brilliant teaching. They were like an electric spark that set our wills aflame.”

Let us now listen to what Canon Ferry has to say. “In his weekly Saturday instructions, Father informally tackled various questions dealing with the moral situation of the College. His sharp, pungent remarks deeply impressed his listeners. To his regular series he sometimes added other talks on topics he deemed useful or opportune. Thus, for several weeks, he commented on the letters of St. Paul ...”

At the conclusion of a priests’ retreat, Cardinal Pie had this to say about Fr. d’Alzon, the retreat-master: “Until now I have heard the chivalrous eloquence of the nobleman, the ardent eloquence of the tribune, the smooth eloquence of the sacred orator, the simple eloquence of the apostle, the masterful eloquence of the bishop. During the last few days, I have heard them all together. Each in turn shone forth wonderfully in the words of your retreat-master, who unites them all.”

Fr. Edmond mentions some traits that it might be useful to group together: “Fr. d’Alzon, man of action, had the Latin genius, firm and vigorous... His style was like the man himself, firm, energetic, impetuous, sometimes familiar, often sublime. Whereas Lacordaire ‘expounded religion and its relation to the needs of men and societies, designing it, so to speak, from the outside...’ (De Broglie, *Eloge de Lacordaire*), Fr. d’Alzon entered directly the realm of faith, tackled dogma head on, and showed to his audience either the adorable obscurities or the intimate splendors of the mystery.”

Fr. d’Alzon had an exact and noble conception of preaching as a ministry. He wrote in his *Reglement de vie*: “As an apostle, I must make

truth known, I must study...As an apostle, I shall love truth which has as its source Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, God himself...As an apostle, I must remember to respect God's word...

"I will preach Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was child, man, poor, king, pontiff, doctor. He passed through all the modalities of life. I shall endeavor to make him known under whatever aspect makes him easiest to accept. That means that I am absolutely obliged to study him as much as I can...An apostle is nothing, except by virtue of the one who sends him forth."

Father's favorite study, as doctrinal base for his sermons, was, besides the Scriptures themselves, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, Bossuet, and church history.

In the pulpit he was noble, at ease, flexible. Father had no physical defects and his bearing was one of majestic dignity. His gestures were restrained but ample, expressive, unhurried. He was natural, never a poseur who aimed at calculated effect.

While he was preaching, as his thought rose to sublime heights, he would gradually raise his arms, gracefully, like a bird rising from earth to fly toward the light. Sometimes, as he warmed to his subject, he would raise his hand to the height of his mouth and bend it slightly, as if it soared above his audience. Little by little, as if to follow the movement of his oratory, he would stretch his hand and extend his arm. There you have the magnificent gesture quite faithfully reproduced in the statues of Fr. d'Alzon at Livry and at the General House in Paris.

Often Father's gestures preceded his words. The people of Nîmes used to say, "When Fr. d'Alzon preaches, his gestures let you guess what he is about to say." He had a habit of looking upward, above the heads of his audience, as if some invisible hand held open for him some book, in which he seemed to read the thoughts which his eloquence developed. But when the need arose, he looked directly at his audience. As soon as he mounted the pulpit, he examined the assembly, as if to size it up. It was an eagle's gaze; he saw the entire group, but individuals did not escape him. He thus knew to whom he was speaking, whom he had to "come to grips with" to use his expression.

Once I witnessed his splendid oratory in the Nîmes cathedral. He was preaching on the presence of God. After having spoken about the

grandeur and the power of God, he stopped abruptly. His arms were crossed and his eyes were blazing. He addressed the unbeliever: "You, man without faith, child of a brief day only, tiny intelligent atom, you dare defy the majesty of God, who could by a breath reduce you to dust. Puny pygmy, what are you alongside God's immensity? And yet God is so great, so powerful, that he mercifully lets you live, even when his justice should have crushed you, in order that you might have time to open your eyes to the light which floods your being."

Father's voice, without being harmonious and in tune, could become resounding. His diction was clear and distinct. He made people listen, and they could follow him easily. He didn't have a musical ear, but he told me himself that from the very outset of a sermon he knew exactly how he had to project his voice, even in a church where he didn't usually preach. That is something that preachers would do well to practice, because it is important for both preacher and audience.

His delivery was far from being monotonous. From the very beginning, he related to his audience. He wasn't just preaching before them, he was addressing them directly. He would get right down to his subject, and a kind of electric current was established between his soul and the souls of his listeners. It was picturesquely said, "When Fr. d'Alzon preaches, he holds the skein and each one of us holds a thread." No one could ever lose his train of thought.

At times he rose to the sublime. Skillfully he could then become chatty and colloquial. After lofty, general considerations, he could pass to practical, detailed applications. At times he had marvelous outbursts of personification when he dealt with the Redeemer, his Holy Mother, or the Church. We know how the love of the Church was his dominant passion. At such times, his very being seemed transformed. His intonations, his heightened stance, his blazing eyes, his heaving chest gave the impression that he was being swept away by love and faith, almost as if he were in ecstasy. Some poet even sent to a newspaper in southern France some verses about Fr. d'Alzon in which we find:

*Et parfois on a peur que ta forte
poitrine
Ne rompe sous l'effort de la source*

divine
Impatiente de jaillir.

(We sometimes fear that your strong
chest
Will burst, by the surge of the
divine well-spring
Anxious to gush forth.)

After such sermons, Father was completely exhausted. He would throw a cloak over his shoulders; and if he was in Nîmes, he would rush to his room and stretch out on his bed for a few hours of rest.

When he preached Advent or Lenten series, he invited his listeners to submit written questions or objections. He would answer some, or refute others in subsequent sermons.

I would like to mention that...almost all of Fr. d'Alzon's former pupils who became priests show some of Father's characteristics in their manner of preaching. That's natural. It couldn't be otherwise when we know about Father's profound influence upon the lads who admired him as a model of perfection. I might mention, among others, the bishop of Montpellier and Fr. Emmanuel Bailly. Their gestures, their way of projecting their voice, their original way of considering and presenting a subject all remind me of Fr. d'Alzon.

Father wanted preachers to be, above all else, men of faith, as he was himself. One day he mentioned something that is not irrelevant here, "The famous English actor, Kemble, was once asked by an Anglican bishop, 'How is it, Mr. Kemble, that you are so popular, so sought after, even though you deal only in fiction? Your immense audiences know that you're dealing only in fiction, but they are moved to tears. Yet we, who preach the truth, have very limited effect upon our congregations, which we can gather only with great difficulty?'

"'Milord,' answered the actor, 'we actors play fiction as if it were truth, whereas you preachers too often preach truth without soul, without faith, as if it were only fiction.'"

Fr. d'Alzon got this story from the tragedian, Donaldson, a disciple of

Kemble. Because it is not found anywhere in the biography of Kemble, I believe it is unpublished and am happy to give it here. Kemble and Donaldson were both Catholics.

FATHER'S HANDWRITING

In these *sketches*, I gather the old and the new, pell-mell. Or rather, I take a basket and throw into it whatever I gather here or there, in the garden of my memories. Then I pass the basket on to you, as such, leaving to others to straighten out its contents and create a fine bouquet with my flowers, after they have discarded the weeds, the wilted flowers, or the thorny stalks.

Having said this, I now want to mention Father's handwriting. His handwriting is well known, but it is not always easy to read. The letters are not clearly formed. The lines are spaced regularly enough, but they tend to rise, rapidly from left to right.

Father's signature, E. d'Alzon, at least in later years was like a ringed caterpillar, ending in a long falling tail. Nonetheless his handwriting had character and lacked neither elegance nor distinction. It even had a certain flair. It was lively, neat, regular even in its irregularity. It was rapid, light, aristocratic.

Once I was in the British Museum, studying two precious manuscripts, Bossuet's sermon for the profession of de la Valliere and his *Relation sur le quiétisme*, with its marginal notes by Fénelon. I happened to have with me a letter from Fr. d'Alzon which he had written the year of his death. As a relaxation from my research, I started to compare the three handwritings. Bossuet pays no heed to regularity or even to spelling. He runs words together. He writes like a raging hurricane. When he crosses out a word or a passage, you would think a storm had wiped them out. Fénelon seems to have written with a very fine metallic pen. His tiny handwriting is neat, clear, light. Even though the great archbishop sometimes seems to let his indignation against Bossuet surge up, he always seems in full self-control. His handwriting is as even then as when he has relatively unimportant things to say.

Fr. d'Alzon's writing seems to combine features of the other two. He has the energy, the impatience, and some of the negligence of Bossuet. But we also find the aristocratic, regular character of Fénelon, if not his

calmness.

If graphology is a science, it is at best a very capricious one. I am surely no expert and I would never dare to explain someone's character by means of his handwriting. Moreover, I knew Father so well that I would undoubtedly make his writing reveal what in reality comes from my own memory, imagination, and heart. So I shall limit myself to giving my impressions and my recollections.

One day Father signed a *celebret* for me.⁹ It wasn't really a signature, just a few curlicues with loose spirals. Underneath were two small marks, like the tiny lines that represent birds in flight in old engravings.

"Father," I said, "who can read that? What does it say?"

"It says Emmanuel d'Alzon."

"And these little birds or insects flying?"

"That means vicar-general. I always sign like that. You're very hard to please."

Then he took his pen in order to form his letters better and he started laughing. "I'll have you know that in Paris, for quite some time, I took lessons in calligraphy from a famous teacher, at fifteen francs a lesson."

"You paid fifteen francs a lesson in order to write like this?"

"Yes. My friend, I don't know the price of the lessons in impertinence which you seem to have had. You profited very well by them. Just to please you, I shall touch up my signature. Maybe my example will bring you to better control your tongue."

It was a good lesson and we both had a good laugh.

STRANGE LOGIC

There was a certain preacher who spoke easily, with a polished style. However, his ideas were shallow and his logic was weak. He once preached a controversial sermon in Nîmes. Fr. d'Alzon, who had heard him preach, was asked what he thought of the sermon. He answered, "In the old days, at the fair of Gignac, there was a charlatan who peddled some kind of ointment. With loud voice and forceful gestures he vaunted his merchandise. Everyone should have a jar of my salve at home. Either

⁹ *celebret*: a document from a church official testifying that a priest is in good standing and thus authorized to administer the sacraments.

it is good or it isn't. If it's good, you should buy some. If it's not good... but it's good, it's good!' Our preacher and his powerful argumentation were like that."

FR. D'ALZON VISITS A BLUESTOCKING

One day we were strolling. Where? It would not seem prudent to reveal that, although our heroine is no longer in this world. A carriage passed by.

"Look," said Fr. d'Alzon, "there's Bishop Mermillod."

The prelate noticed us, stopped his carriage, opened the door, and said, "I am alone. Would you be so kind as to accompany me where I am going? It's not far. I must return Mme de N...'s visit of a few days ago."

Father didn't seem very anxious to accept the invitation, because he knew the lady in question, though he had never spoken to her. But to please a bishop, his friend, he entered the carriage and I did also. When we had arrived at her home, the lady in question descended the stairs, followed by her husband, in order to greet the bishop, who introduced Fr. d'Alzon.

"I am most honored," said the lady, "to receive in my home such a distinguished vicar-general." The husband echoed the wife's compliment, but with a tiny twist. Rather than say, "We are most honored..." he said, "Madame is truly honored..." That was enough to give Father the clue to the whole situation. When I was introduced, all I got was a slight nod of the head from the lady and a sideward glance from the husband. Decidedly, in their eyes, I counted for very little.

All this took place at the foot of stairs. Then we went up to the salon. Madame and the bishop went first. The husband followed, doubtlessly to watch the long train of the dress of the sovereign mistress of the house and prevent us from trampling her train. Fr. d'Alzon looked at me without saying a word, but his look was eloquent. If we had continued looking at each other, we would have burst out laughing. We got to the salon. Madame offered the bishop an arm-chair, pointed to a sofa for Fr. d'Alzon and me, and with her finger indicated a chair for her husband. Then she sat down next to the bishop.

She spread herself out like a queen. She was tall, skinny, wizened.

Her eyes were greenish-blue. Her too-dark hair was covered with flowers and leaves; it was a real garden. As she sat down, she performed a skillful but ungraceful pirouette, causing her immense tan dress to spread out like a half-inflated balloon. She thought she was majestic! She was ridiculous. If only we had dared tell her.

Fr. d'Alzon, a true nobleman, dignified and distinguished, never a poseur, sat on the sofa, in striking contrast to the fine lady. We were far enough away to be able to converse in a low voice. She was telling the bishop about the smashing success of her latest work, the impression produced by her most recent article, and the wonderful effect of a certain poem. Work, article, or poem, we had never even heard about! We overheard her conversation without taking part in it, because she spoke to the bishop exclusively.

Father leaned toward me and said, "My friend, we've fallen into a trap. We're lost. Soon she will start to read from one of her productions. How can we escape? What a bluestocking! Compare her for an instant to our poor Marie Chauvelly. That poor woman never wrote a poem, and her prose is not the kind crowned by the Academy. Yet her soul is filled with heavenly poetry. Her language is pure, with a power of persuasion that no bluestocking can ever have unless she ceases to be a bluestocking and learns from Marie Chauvelly. And notice the poor wretch of a husband. . ."

At this point, the bishop rose to take his leave. We rose eagerly. The procession down was like that going up. At the door, the usual trite remarks were mouthed. We hurried into the bishop's carriage, which brought us to his residence. Along the way, not a single word was spoken about our little visit. We spoke of everything else. Bp. Mermillod's taste was just like that of Fr. d'Alzon concerning the little show we had just attended.

Who was Marie Chauvelly? Bp. de Cabrières mentioned her in his speech for the Golden Jubilee of Assumption. "Marie Chauvelly grew old in the love of religion. She was a veritable heroine of piety whose name deserves to be mentioned alongside that of Fr. d'Alzon, for whom she always had such deep respect and devotion." All the alumni of Assumption remember this humble woman, clad in black, rapid in her walk, who carried on her arm a basket filled with bread for the poor,

medals, rosaries, books, holy pictures, which she distributed to workmen at their jobs, to school children, to anyone Fr. d'Alzon asked her to.

When Marie Chauvelly died, she left her modest inheritance to Bp. Plantier of Nîmes. The money enabled him to establish a new parish. It is true to say that the foundress of the church of St. Francis de Sales is Marie Chauvelly. What immeasurable distance between her and the bluestocking, even though the bluestocking was honest, virtuous, and way down deep, a good Christian. But, sad to say, she was a bluestocking!

A FATHER'S WISE ADVICE

A terrible storm once broke over the head of a young priest, alumnus of Assumption College. He wrote a long letter to Fr. d'Alzon explaining the whole affair and concluding by these words, "Don't fear for me, Father. I foresaw what would happen. I feel strong and am ready to fight. I don't regret what I did, because I believe I am serving the cause of the Church."

The return mail brought this fatherly reprimand. "My friend, what are you saying? You feel strong enough for the struggle? How can you write such a thing? The enthusiasm of youth can excuse you, up to a point, but I beg you not to play the hero. Pray, humble yourself, be prudent, especially when you speak or write. My friend, what foolish words! 'I feel strong.' What can we do without God's grace? From grace alone comes our strength. When we count on our own poor resources, we end up by ruining even the best cause. If you want God's blessing in your present troubles, I repeat, humble yourself, put aside all self-esteem, take refuge in solitude, far from false friends. Seek to do God's will in everything, but don't live in hope of victory. Make yourself small and shun public approbation. Place yourself unreservedly in the hands of God and of those whom he has established as judges in your case. Never, even for a moment, turn away from the Catholic spirit, which is one of submission, sacrifice, and humility. God will know how to repay your self-abasement if he deigns use you for some purpose. You know how interested I am in anything which concerns you, and in conclusion I say: Let's not compromise. Adieu. Yours in Our Lord, E. d'Alzon."

LITERARY RELAXATION

Father read a great deal. Never have I met anyone who read more rapidly, with greater attention or greater powers of retention. Sometimes in conversation he would quote long passages from classical authors. When he gave an account of some work he had just read, his analysis was complete. He had the knack of seizing a writer's main thoughts and of presenting them clearly. He had great powers of both synthesis and analysis. He often seemed like a watchmaker who takes apart a watch and puts springs with springs, screws with screws, wheels with wheels. Having carefully examined each part, explained its function, judged its worth, he would put the machinery back together again. That's how Father analyzed a book.

When he was tired, he relaxed by reading classical authors. He had a fine collection of which he was very proud. His favorite authors were Cicero, Sallust, and Seneca the Elder. Of Cicero, he read especially the philosophical works. Sometimes when I visited him during the holidays, he read me some passages which had struck him and gave me his explanation and commentary.

"I admire," he said, "the majesty of Cicero's style, the strength of Sallust's laconic style, and the clarity and simplicity of Seneca. I am amazed at the fine feelings in their writings. Yet how all this philosophy pales in comparison with the Christian revelation! The more I read of Seneca, the more I'm convinced that he must have conversed with Christians. During his service in Asia Minor, might he not have met St. Paul? Did he speak to him? How else can you explain the Christian meaning he gives to such terms as *caro*, *spiritus*, *sanguis* and many others? Listen, I'll read you a section of his treatise on examen of conscience. You'll see how he never went to sleep without having carefully examined his day, his thoughts, words, and deeds."

After the Latins, Father admired the Englishmen. Not only theologians like Newman, Manning, Faber, and others, but even political writers like Lord Macaulay and historians like Lingard. He left aside the poets because, he said, he couldn't understand them well enough to enjoy the beauty of their thought and the charm of their verses. But he kept in mind certain passages of Shakespeare which expressed his Catholic feelings.

Bishop de Cabrières' words on the occasion of Father's memorial service are true. "During their lifetime, we live side by side with great men, but we really don't know them well. We see only the surface even of those whose disciples and companions we were" (Speech at Memorial service for Fr. d'Alzon, 1895).

Ever since death has placed a certain distance between Father and us, we see him as some kind of majestic monument which impresses us more now than it did previously, when we were closer to him. His features strike us as being more distinct, more harmonious. His great character emerges in all its beauty. We are amazed that we could ever have been disciples of such a master, companions of such an eminent man, and that we can call ourselves sons of such a Father.

THE PILOT'S EYE

Father's powers of intuition and penetration have often been mentioned. His view of the future seemed so assured that some of his writings seem prophetic. Is it rash to call them prophecies after events have borne them out? Here are three selected examples:

I — In 1868, at the General Chapter, Fr. d'Alzon said, "The distinct character of the Congregation can still be shaped by the role it plays in social movements and political events. We are part of a social movement as the initiators of a new order of things, as restorers of a ruined past, as defenders of a present we love, or as adorers of some marvelous future which we hope for and predict.

"The past can never be fully restored. Some ruins we do well to regret and rebuild. Others we do well to leave in the dust. For instance, today everybody moves toward democracy, and they do so without Faith. Couldn't we take part in such a movement as initiators, by injecting into the machinery of civil society the Catholic spirit, which has been drying up, to the detriment of civilization? To succeed in this, might we not, with all due respect, get rid of some ancient institutions? They were only forms to begin with and their revival is unimportant, as far as principles are concerned.

"Would it be really dangerous to forgive the present some of its minor faults, which owe their existence to the needs of the moment rather than to some really anti-Christian ideas?"

II — In 1878, Fr. d'Alzon wrote to a former pupil: "I study Russia a great deal. I am irresistibly drawn to following the movements of this colossus which God seems to want to shake up in order to bring it where it doesn't want to go. When Providence wanted to renew the diseased blood of Europe, it sent countless barbarian battalions, which the Church baptized and made its own.

"Something tells me that Russia has a mission to the Catholic Church and the Holy See. The Latin races have become unfaithful; their governments have become persecutors. Shall we see salvation come from the icy steppes of the vast empire? When and how? The observant eye of the Christian cannot turn away from this direction, from which arises a phenomenon as yet indistinct and unclear, but which each day takes on astonishing proportions. There is there a powerful ferment for great evil or for immense good. I lean toward hoping for good."

III — The following letter bears no date, but the facts mentioned in it leave no doubt about the time when it was written.

"My dear friend,

Tell Bishop Manning that I thought I should resign as vicar-general, and I have just done so.

"I shall devote myself exclusively to my Congregation. I believe that I shall have to come to the defense of religious congregations in Rome, against the tendencies of certain bishops who fear their encroachments and would see them either suppressed or merged under a common rule.

"Believe me, if God wants the existence of these various congregations, he will, by unforeseen events which he controls, know how to bring the bishops themselves to defend courageously against future enemies the very congregations which they would like to get rid of. God directs the Church..."

We have only to compare past events and dates in order to see the import of the preceding documents. It seems almost as if Fr. d'Alzon already knew all the encyclicals of Leo XIII and had already guessed what line the great Pope would lay down for the direction of all Christians of all political parties in France. Father's letter on Russia lets us see how far-reaching his view was, seeing in the distant and confused future events which today strike us very forcefully, either because signs

tell us they are about to happen or because they have already happened. In articles which he signed "A friend of Russia," Fr. d'Alzon wrote something worthy of repeating, "The Russian peasant: as citizen, he knows how to obey; as soldier, he knows how to suffer; as Christian, he knows how to hope..."

"We will see in Russia something like what happened two hundred years ago in the United States, England, and Ireland. Little by little religious freedom will regain its rights and we shall see the Catholic church sow in this land where ignorance and superstition had prepared the ruin of the moral order..."

At the conclusion of the General Chapter, September 18, 1875, the founder of the Assumptionists cried out, "The disciples, having become apostles, set out to conquer the world. Consider, my brothers, whether you want to conquer Russia and store up an abundant harvest in the barns of the Father. I tremble in speaking to you thus, and yet something in me tells me that, Assumption willing and God helping, such a harvest will be."

Have we forgotten the courageous conduct of the bishops at the time of the expulsion of the religious? Today in 1895, are we not happy to see a re-awakening of the Catholic spirit under the influence of a wonderfully united French episcopate? Fr. d'Alzon had foreseen and described these events. Faith enlightened his fine intelligence. His eye was clear and observant because he saw all things in God and for God.

If I were an Assumptionist monk, I would always want on my desk, next to St. Thomas Aquinas, a book of Fr. d'Alzon's writings. They would be nourishment for my mind and my heart. Such writings would be like the famed waters of Toledo in which steel is tempered. These sword blades are hardened, but they remain flexible and their cutting edge is hard to blunt. In these writings I would temper my soul, and after the process it would still be strong and supple.

JUST A PLAIN CONTROVERSY

Father had preached somewhere in the Cévennes, and his sermons had deeply moved the Protestant population, which was in the majority. One day, a Methodist preacher came to see Father, to argue with him face to face. Father received him kindly, and at first the conversation

proceeded quite calmly. Father's self-control was obvious. Pushed by Father's close logic however, the poor minister became angry and cried out, "You're smothering me. Let's proceed more slowly." Here are some fragments of the controversy:

The Methodist — "After all, one thing is certain and undoubted: the Bible is God's word."

Father — "I admit, as you do, that the Bible is God's word, but not all of God's word."

"What? Is there some word of God besides the Bible?"

"Yes. The Bible is the written word. There is another word, the spoken word, which is Tradition."

"I don't need any Tradition. My Bible, which I always carry with me, is enough."

"No, that's not enough. You delude yourself. Who tells you that the Bible you have is the true Bible?"

"I received it from my forebears."

"You received it, so you say, from your ancestors, who themselves got it from others who, you may be sure, go back to the Catholic Church. But someone, someone whom you trust, has told you, 'This is the Bible!' You'll admit that that's already somewhat of a Tradition."

"True, but I don't need any tradition to read the book."

"Again you are mistaken. Tell me, haven't you ever come across certain obscure passages that you didn't understand too well? What did you do to clear things up?"

"I read the most authoritative commentators."

"Again, Tradition! More than once you have consulted your colleagues or your neighbors... Isn't that so? Not trusting your individual interpretation, you relied on the knowledge of others. It seems to me that we have here at least a hint of Tradition. Let me continue... You say that the Bible is God's word. Very true. But haven't you noticed that without an authoritative tradition, in other words, without a teaching authority, God's word can well become man's word, and even the devil's word? It's all a question of interpretation. When it's faithful, it is God who speaks. When it's false, it is man or the devil who speaks. You know that "the written letters bring death, but the Spirit gives life." (II Cor 3:6)

“I am not going to bother with all this quibbling. I read my Bible; I teach it to others and I am sure that I am saved because of my faith in Christ. You Catholics are not real adorers. You have ceremonies, flowers, candles, confessionals — you go against God’s word. Doesn’t Jesus say, in John, chapter four, verse twenty-three, “The hour will come -in fact it is already here — when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth”?”

“We Catholics usually give to each the titles he deserves. I call you Mister. I don’t know why like you I should say simply John. So I say Saint John really said the words you quoted, but even they militate against you. Let’s admit that you adore the Father *in spirit*. That’s not enough! What about *in truth*? Doesn’t that mean that God must be adored as he truly wants to be adored? The Old Law had its ceremonies. So does the New Law. Otherwise why do you baptize or celebrate the Last Supper? Be logical! Do everything in the spirit. Be satisfied with only the intention. If you admit some ceremonies, you admit, by that very fact, that adoring in the *spirit* is not enough. One must *adore in truth*, according to some prescription of cult, according to some way that has been handed down to us.” At this point, the Methodist had enough. His tone, manner, and arguments changed and he said, “After all, I am happy as I am. I know that I am saved.”

“You’re sure, absolutely sure of your salvation? Who told you so?”

“Oh! I am saved. The Spirit told me so, “in groanings which cannot be expressed in speech” (Rom 8:26)

“Then please stand up so that I can three times go around your fortunate person. Why? To see all sides of this rare phenomenon of a man of flesh and bone, still living in this world, who carries within him the assurance of salvation. No world’s fair ever exhibited such a wonder. If it were true, I would envy you. You said the Bible was God’s word didn’t you? And you’ve read St. Paul?”

“Paul. He’s our great man, our perfect apostle. Of course I’ve read him and reread him.”

“Your great man, your perfect apostle, never dared claim he was saved. Despite your many qualities, like me, you are very small alongside St. Paul. Yet you bravely proclaim that you are saved? Not that you hope to be saved, but are actually saved! Listen to St. Paul

writing to the Philippians, (2:12) ‘Work for your salvation in fear and trembling.’ And Ecclesiastes said, (9:1) ‘Man does not know if he is worthy of love or hate.’ You are more fortunate than these inspired writers, the apostles, and all the elect. From now on you know that you are saved. My congratulations. Come now, my dear sir, let’s be serious because time is fleeing. Let me thank you for dropping in and let me again quote from the Bible. ‘The night is almost over, it will be daylight soon. Let us give up all things we prefer to do under cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light.’ That’s St. Paul again, my dear sir” (Rom 13:12)

The two antagonists parted as friends. That’s all I can say. A clergyman passed me his transcript of this exchange, while I was curate in Montpellier, and he allowed me to make my own copy.

QUIPS AND SALLIES

Cupid with glasses: B..., who was tonsured at the time, was professor and monitor at Assumption College and was very nearsighted. Moreover, he had an excessively tender heart, somewhat fickle. He became attached, then detached, then attached once again. The wanderings of his affections were legendary. At assembly, Fr. d’Alzon had poked fun at special friendships, with all the finesse at his command. As he concluded, he made a remark which we students had been expecting for a long time. “The ancients,” said Father, “represented the god of earthly love blindfolded. If Cupid is blind, it is not surprising that the prince of tender thoughts be near-sighted.”

Excusable distraction: There was a solemn high Mass in the College chapel. Fr. d’Alzon was celebrant, Fr. Barnouin was deacon, and Fr. Brun, sub-deacon. After the chant of the Epistle, the sub-deacon came to kneel for the blessing, according to the rubrics. Fr. d’Alzon said to him, “You sang off key from start to finish. But I’ll bless you anyhow.” And he made the prescribed sign of the cross.

The feed-bag: There was a meeting, not of workers, but of gentlemen, to agree upon measures that should be taken to assure the election of Catholic candidates. It was under the Empire. There was a lot of talk but no progress, because many of these gentlemen did not want to compromise themselves and feared they would lose their official

positions. There was a lot of oratorical courage, but a lot of cowardice in action. "Come, gentlemen," said Father laughing, "arm yourselves from head to toe, but don't lose sight of the feed-bag!"

Father's remark turned the tide: generosity prevailed over selfish views. Agreement was reached, the struggle was organized, and victory assured.

A Father's heart: A bishop was bitterly complaining about the conduct of a young priest, a former student of Fr. d'Alzon. In a flash, Father came to the defense of his pupil.

"But," said the prelate, "you haven't always approved of the priest yourself, and his zeal is frequently imprudent and far too foolhardy."

"Excellence, for my children I have the heart of a father and the weakness of a mother. I know how to punish them when need be, but I'll always defend them. When they're attacked in my presence, especially if they're attacked immoderately, my heart leaps like that of an angry tigress."

Crows and frogs: One day we were passing a cathedral. "Let's go in," said Father, "and pay our respects to the Lord." The canons were in the choir. Hired singers were chanting the evening prayer, very poorly. "Have you ever heard such cacophony?" said Father. "Doesn't it sound like crows cawing and frogs croaking in a muddy swamp? What an unworthy and rude way to speak to God and to profane the Scriptures by butchering them thus! If God gives me the grace, I want to present him some day with choirs of religious who will calmly articulate their prayer and will speak to the Lord with the respect he deserves."

A FATHER PROUD OF HIS SONS

A certain canon, whom Father had more than once called to task for his Gallican ideas that sometimes bordered on Jansenism and for his poor taste in questions of religious art, got back at Father by saying, "It is said that Fr. d'Alzon has a grand aristocratic air. I say he has an I-don't-give-a-damn air." There was a smattering of truth in the remark. And the canon, had he dared quote Latin, might have added, *Experto crede Roberto*.

Father was not a scoffer, but he was fearless in defending truth. People's opinion made little difference to him. In everything he sought

only the will of God. Father never bowed beneath insults, but used them instead to humble himself, as I find in numerous letters where he says in English, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

His heart was too tender, his feelings too delicate, for him to be insensitive. But he easily shook off any barbs directed at him personally. However, when his dear ones were attacked, he reacted strongly.

Let us remember some of his words, spoken to those privileged to share his last moments. "My dear brothers, you know that after God and the Blessed Virgin, I loved you more than anything else in this world."

He was proud of his disciples' success in the world, but was especially proud of their Christian attitude. He followed each one closely, especially the priests. He encouraged them in their struggles, helped them in their difficulties and was pleased to speak of their victories. He was happy when alumni returned to "re-charge their batteries," so to speak.

Without a word, he quietly followed them in their careers. He never lost sight of them when they had problems, as frequently happens to men in public life. At such painful moments, when they seemed abandoned by everyone, even by fearful friends, they found close by a devoted and tender father, never too tired to help, always ready to defend.

Bishop Besson rightly applied to Fr. d'Alzon the phrase of Bossuet, "Even the shadow of Fr. d'Alzon can win battles." Is it not this shade, this spirit, which still directs the advance of the Assumptionists? Does it not still drive his many followers, priests, religious, laymen, to heroism in doing God's will...in absolute devotion to the only cause worthy of all our efforts, the Kingdom of Jesus Christ?

Fr. d'Alzon's spirit is present in the strength of resistance in the souls of his disciples. It holds out against trials, failures, and temptations. Those whom the master has trained bear within themselves an imprint that cannot be effaced.

FAREWELL TO A MISSIONARY

One of Father's sons¹⁰ was leaving to become a missionary in

¹⁰ Galeran himself.

England. After having blessed him, Fr. d'Alzon said to him: "The Pope is sending you to England, my son. You have a mission to work to extend the reign of Jesus Christ by saving and sanctifying souls. Be faithful to your mandate. You will do good and at the same time much good will be done to you. Your fiery temperament will be dampened by the northern fog. Your imagination and adventurous spirit will be calmed to a certain extent by contact with a serious, practical, and patient race. Your ardor will be cooled a few degrees by British coolness. It won't be destroyed; you will still have enough left.

"Here you are considered as too fiery. I wouldn't be surprised if, after several years of ministry in England, you became as cold as a Breton. The consensus here is that, of all my sons, you are the least suited to live in England. I believe otherwise. Apostles are sent to evangelize races to which they do not, usually, belong. They differ from these people in temperament and blood.

"I have studied England quite a bit. This great people are not an apostate people. They were fooled and robbed of their Catholic faith. They never rejected their faith but were deprived of it by the ruses of their leaders. This is the opinion of Newman and Manning.

"Pius IX is the first Pope who really popularized the Papacy. Formerly it was believed, as it is again now, that the Holy Father was the visible head of the Church; but in practice people knew only their pastor and then their bishop. Englishmen heard of quarrels between Henry VIII and the Pope. They prayed for peace between the two but went no further. After the king broke with Rome, the churches still had bishops, priests; Mass was still said and sacraments administered. The Blessed Virgin was still honored. Apparently there had been no change, and the people never went to the root of things. Martyrs were seen going to their death, but they were considered rebels against royal authority. To be sure, some attempts to defend papal supremacy were made in Northern England, but the mass of people remained tranquil and continued to believe themselves Catholic. Under Mary Tudor, Cardinal Pole solemnly reconciled England and Rome, but then Elizabeth gradually completed the schism and established the reign of heresy.

"My dear son, now you will have to preach the Catholic faith to a people who have lost sight of it for three centuries. Way down deep, the

English people have remained religious. They love to learn, and they are not indifferent or sarcastic. There are many people of good faith in England. They believe that the Bible is inspired, and that's already a solid basis for debate. So become expert in exegesis. In England that should be fairly easy to do because the Bible is studied very seriously. Someday you will preach in English, and your French ardor, moderated by English calm, can make of you a very popular preacher. Don't try to be theatrical. Be simple, clear, and logical. Flee applause. 'We are ambassadors for Christ' (II Cor 5:20).

"Preach dogma especially. Quote Scripture precisely. Base yourself on the first Councils and the Fathers of the first five centuries, as they are accepted by the Anglicans. Avoid aggressive controversy. Like the Apostles, preach, expound truth, and allow grace to act upon consciences.

"A famous Englishman, Lord Macaulay, a Protestant, wrote, "Men are not converted by hitting them with in-folios." St. Ambrose wrote, "It is not by dialectics that God wants to save the world." Be apostolic in your teaching. Study constantly, prepare your sermons carefully but don't write them out once you've mastered English sufficiently. Stay in direct contact with your audience and don't be satisfied with just preaching *before* them. A dignified conversational style, which does not exclude natural and timely flights of oratory, is the true style for a preacher of the Gospel. It is, in fact, the true English manner.

"The Englishman loves oratorical action, but, according to what Cardinal Manning told me, he wants the speaker to remain master of himself and have sober gestures and controlled feelings. The horseman who controls his steed's action is preferable to the one who, with floppy reins, lets himself be carried away.

"Preach on the Church often, on its policies, its government, its justice, its right to teach. Show the English that Jesus founded a church which is a kingdom ruled by a monarch, his Vicar on earth. Countless English martyrs, fallen in the defense of papal supremacy, will bless your ministry. In England, and especially in London, you will tread upon soil that drank in the blood of heroes of the Catholic faith. Do you think that so many saints crowned in heaven can ever remain indifferent to the conversion of the English people?

“My son, go wherever God sends you. Become a saint, a priest detached from everything, having no other thought than the glory of God and the extension of the reign of the King whom we have the honor to serve.

“In times past, England was called the Isle of Saints and the Dower of the Virgin Mary. Work to revive these glorious titles. Let’s keep in touch, dear son. Write often and keep me informed of your work. My heart, as you know, will always be alongside yours.”

The missionary who received this advice from Fr. d’Alzon, affirmed, after thirty years of active ministry in England, that the advice was wise, practical, and amazing, coming as it did from someone who had never visited England yet knew it so well. Father and son exchanged letters until Father’s death. Some day, I hope, these letters will be published, for the instruction of young Assumptionist missionaries, especially those in English-speaking countries.

Father d’Alzon read English fluently. A London book-dealer sent him all the important books dealing with religious questions, by Catholic or Protestant writers. He knew English literature well. He especially admired the style of Lord Macaulay and liked to quote his eloquent passages on the grandeur of the Papacy and the Catholic Church.

While he was a student in Paris, he became very friendly with some young Englishmen. Many owed their conversion to him. Among them was the chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Reverend Allies, famous for his fine works on the Church and the Papal Supremacy. There must exist somewhere a whole series of letters from Father to Rev. Allies, who often spoke of him with gratitude. He died quite a few years ago.

A PROTECTIVE SHIELD

A former pupil of Father, who was pastor of an important parish in the Hérault, ran into trouble with the Imperial Government and the diocesan authorities. As often happens in such cases, the priest’s friends were scared away and the adorers of Caesar rejoiced in his humiliation. The question of papal authority had brought on this persecution.

Father immediately came to the defense of his pupil. He left Nîmes and set up his base of operations at Lavagnac. He scoured the

neighboring parishes, questioning priests and laymen. He gathered testimonials of the good conduct and zeal of the priest in question, amassed a whole dossier, and added a long report himself. He sent all these documents to Rome, to the Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs, designated by the Pope to examine the question. Archbishop Franchi of Salonika was secretary of this Congregation.

The young priest had already arrived in Rome and was greatly surprised to learn from Bishop Franchi that a learned canonist had instructed the Congregation in its investigation. It was Fr. d'Alzon who had taken charge of defending his son.

AMBITION WITHOUT BRAINS

Fr. d'Alzon used to say, "A skylark is fooled and captured by means of a mirror. An ambitious cleric is enthralled by a mitre. Which one is the more scatterbrained? The poor lark is plucked, roasted and eaten, but the other, once captured, is good for nothing. If he were eaten, he'd prove indigestible. He lives disappointed, malcontent, unhappy, crushed beneath a burden. If then he only left others alone! But instead he annoys them by his odd behavior, he irritates them by imprudent jolts of authority, he breeds confusion by arbitrary and unwise measures!

"St. Anselm's hand had to be pried open to force him to seize the pastoral staff. Thus people were sure of having a real bishop and not a dizzy skylark. It's disastrous when ambitious people are worse than larks. That's when we have to cry out to souls to watch out for themselves and take refuge on the rock of St. Peter."

OUR SPIRITUAL FATHER

We are not wrong when we say that we are sons of the sorrows, the penances, the tribulations, and the death of Fr. d'Alzon. He had to drink a bitter chalice before bringing forth in us that spirit so well defined by Bishop de Cabrières when he said, "To whom does the world belong? Not the world of power, but the world of respect and justice. Only to the ideas that made up and still make up Assumption..."

Assumption has gathered and preciously keeps this rich heritage, which is its *raison d'être*, its strength and its glory. Assumption is an imposing group of religious, male and female, of alumni, and of

countless souls that felt Fr. d'Alzon's influence and received from him an indelible imprint.

Let us return to the source of these generous movements, to the heart of Fr. d'Alzon, wrought and fashioned by the grace of God. Father never resisted God's grace. He allowed God's grace to work upon him. Always attentive to God's will, he hastened to submit to it without counting the sacrifices this would impose upon him. In the glorious journey that could have led him to the highest dignities, he paused and, so it seemed to men, lowered himself to become a school-master, to live among school-boys, among people generally inferior to him.

He had an immense fortune. He lost it, knowing full well that he was losing it. He even fell into serious financial difficulties. He got out of them, and then fell back in because he never knew how to be parsimonious when it was a question of extending the reign of Jesus Christ. He ran into opposition even from his disciples, male and female. In particularly trying times, he seemed alone, isolated, turned into ridicule. Yet he stayed firm, looking toward the heavens and never straying from the course God had set for him.

Until the end of his life Father suffered. It is not reckless to say that Father's death was hastened by bitter deceptions brought on by people he had guided along the way to holiness and upon whom he could normally have counted. We all know how much his sensitive heart suffered. He had never deceived anyone, but he was himself deceived. Still, he kept in his heart the peace which the world cannot know, cannot give, nor take away. Like the Apostle Paul he often said, "We can boast about our sufferings" (Rom 5:3). And he emerged victorious! This is the spirit bequeathed to us by this father who, by an ineffable grace of God, engendered us to the life of Assumption.

A RELIGIOUS ARISTOCRACY

During my stay in Jerusalem, one of my favorite relaxations was to review the life of Fr. d'Alzon with the help of my notes and recollections. This man, raised up by God, was accused of inconsistency, yet as founder he unvaryingly pursued the same straight path in realizing his plans and presenting the main points of his doctrine.

At the General Chapter, September 18, 1873, Father said, "Have you

thought, like me, that the main objective of this Chapter was the establishment of an aristocracy of ability, knowledge, and virtue placed at the head of our religious family? It is rash to speak thus when one has the honor of presiding such a group. But if I speak not of what is, I speak of what must be ...”

In 1892, even before the publication of *L'Assomption et ses oeuvres*, I said to the Jerusalem community something which I repeat here. Fr. d'Alzon had said to me during an outing, “The Church is a combination of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. In a religious congregation, it's a good thing to have an aristocracy which renews itself with the help of a democracy. It is the only way to maintain traditions, to set a tone by stimulating emulation which does not harm humility. The rule must be the same for everyone. We must never accept situations which grant privileges, dispensations, or permanent diminutions which would be motivated not by health or other reasons and which would be granted to reward work or success, which God alone will one day reward.”

These words were spoken in 1846. In his official language of 1873, Father was fine-tuning ideas he had expressed already in 1846. He tried to give his congregation an aristocratic touch. By aristocracy he meant a certain elevation of thought, a breadth of feeling, and distinction in manners. Unless I am mistaken, such is the spirit of Assumption.

To consider things in their proper perspective, Father placed himself as close as possible to the Head of the Church. It is from the top of Peter's rock that he considered world events. Walking thus with the Pope, he never for a moment went astray.

His generous heart was never narrow or cynical. He gave generously of his resources and his devotion. He never counted money or sacrifices when it was a question of serving the Church. He considered his own popularity unimportant; he never hesitated to risk his reputation. He never stopped to admire himself. He never held back in the service of his King, Jesus, who was the passion of his soul.

He desired his disciples to be unpretentious and unconstrained. Their manners were to be simple, easy, unassuming. He often quoted the English proverb, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” He repeated that worldly politeness, and even more so religious politeness, is based on the principle: know how to put yourself out for others. He added,

“Genteel manners must characterize a religious, who is constantly in contact with society. It is not a question of affected, sweet, mincing, or effeminate manners. Rather it is something determined and dignified, which attracts sympathy while precluding familiarity.”

He said to a religious who used to swing his arms as he walked, “Have you been asked to sow parsley?” And to another, “When you want to blow your nose so hard, please notify us and we will suspend the office until the storm passes.” To still another who hunched over his food at table he said, “You need an awfully long time to examine your food. Go to it a bit more rapidly.” Of course Father would not have to make such remarks to present-day Assumptionists.

A final example: Father and I were crossing the esplanade of Nîmes. He noticed a young religious approaching us. He said, “You may be sure that he’ll bump right into you or me unless we separate and let him pass between us. Look at him! He’s looking down, head low, walking in a bee-line. Let’s move aside...He’ll go right by us without noticing.”

In fact, the young brother came right at us until Father stopped him. He looked at us dumbfounded. Fr. d’Alzon said, “My friend, rules of decorum were established in order to make us masters of our senses and not to give us the appearance of zombies. Let’s avoid exaggeration in everything.”

He once noticed that a young religious recited the Office without any perceptible lip movements. He approached him and said, “Homer defines man as an articulate animal. Articulation is formed by the lips. Articulate your prayer by using the lips which the good Lord gave you to chant or recite his word.” Although Father was very broad in his principles, he neglected no detail. He has been called excessive and inconsistent and he was reminded of the ancient saying, “*De minimis non curat Praetor*” (The Praetor doesn’t bother with minor details). But those who judged Father thus saw only the surface of things.

On the fifteenth anniversary of Father’s death, Bishop de Cabrières said, “During their lifetime, we rub elbows with great men without really knowing them; and when we read their biographies we must admit... that we saw only the surface of the people whose disciples and companions we were.” He’s right. All of Fr. d’Alzon’s sons have had the same thought, though they may not have expressed it as well as the

learned prelate.

A COLLECTION OF JUDGMENTS ON FR. D'ALZON

Here is a collection of pearls of all sizes and colors, carefully collected for my pleasure and presented to the Assumptionists for their consideration. The pearls are not set in gold, nor are they arranged in any symmetrical or chronological order. They were gathered here and there, now and then, until finally they formed a precious collection which charmed my eyes and my heart during the long winter nights I spent near the sea-swept cliffs in the solitude of Cornwall.

Cardinal Manning wrote to notify me of the elevation to the episcopate of my old friend, Anatole de Cabrières. He said, "You understand how I rejoice at the nomination of a priest whom I know and whose virtues and qualities I appreciate. I rejoice especially because Fr. de Cabrières is a former pupil of the famous Fr. d'Alzon. We are therefore assured of having in him a Catholic bishop in the full sense of the term."

Bishop William Vaughan, of Plymouth, visited me and said, "I know Fr. d'Alzon very well. He has struck me as being a perfect priest and gentleman. My uncle, Cardinal Weld, had noticed him in Rome. He spoke about him as a young cleric destined to play an important role in the Church. It pleased people to see this intelligent and distinguished man at the lectures given by Dr. Wiseman in Cardinal Weld's salon. I remember that Cardinal Wiseman spoke to me about him, at Clifton, in these terms, 'Fr. d'Alzon was, among the young clergymen in Rome, the most remarkable because of his piety, his distinction, his intelligence. He thirsted for knowledge, and it was not some taste of knowledge for its own sake, but a desire to know in order to serve Jesus Christ in his Church.'" The worthy bishop added, "Father d'Alzon liked the English a lot and knew perfectly well all our religious and political history."

In London, I often met Fr. Allies, who had been chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury. After his conversion to Catholicism, Fr. Allies devoted all his life and knowledge to the service of the Church. He wrote famous books on papal supremacy. He said to me one day, "After God, it is to Fr. d'Alzon that I owe my conversion. I knew him in Paris before he became a priest. His conversations then were to me

flashes of light. We became close friends and for many years kept up a correspondence which guided my footsteps like a beacon.”

Fr. Charles Faure, Marist, founder of the works of Notre-Dame de France in London, said, “When I was trying to raise money for my undertaking in the various dioceses of France, I met Fr. d’Alzon in Nîmes. He was the most impressive figure I met, not excluding the bishops. When he learned of my project, he welcomed me enthusiastically. He greatly encouraged me, helped me financially, and suggested that I call my future church in the center of the city: Notre-Dame de France.”

Dr. Forbes, bishop of Brechin in Scotland, called by the English press the only theologian in the Anglican church, once told me while we were dining with a friend, “Fr. d’Alzon has the audacious zeal of Manning and the power of synthesis of Newman. Were he English, he would be at the head of the religious movement toward Rome.”

Fr. Argillies, pastor of Frontignan, theologian, and deputy to a Provincial Council in Avignon, said, “The most outstanding member of the Council was Fr. d’Alzon. As canonist and theologian, he had enormous influence, without ever forgetting the reserve required by his inferiority in rank to the bishops. Not only the priests but also the Council Fathers consulted him. When he spoke, forcefully and honestly, he obliged people to listen and he commanded the admiration of even the few who were opposed to him. He was recognized as the brave defender of Roman ideas, and it is to him that must be credited the negative votes which rejected the decrees proposed by certain Gallicans.”

Fr. Martin d’Agde, pastor of St. Denis in Montpellier, author of a scholarly book on St. John Chrysostom: “Every time Fr. d’Alzon honors me with a visit, my house remains perfumed as if by the passing of a saint.”

Fr. Cresseil, dean of Cette and former pastor of Montagnac, told me as I arrived to be one of his curates, “I am pleased to welcome as a curate a priest formed by Fr. d’Alzon. Coming from such a school and following the advice of such a master, you can only do great good here and everywhere.” He added, “I had in my parish here a young man from Assumption College, who came from Nîmes every year to go

swimming. He received Holy Communion and attended all religious services in his college uniform. He edified all the parishioners. As pastor in Montagnac I often visited Lavagnac. I know the d'Alzon family well." The young man he mentioned was Anatole de Cabrières. The old dean later had the pleasure of seeing him as bishop of Montpellier.

At the end of a formal dinner, Mr. Pégat, President of the Chamber of Montpellier, rose and came to me, a champagne glass in each hand. "Like me, you are a friend and admirer of Fr. d'Alzon. Take this glass and let us drink to the health of Fr. d'Alzon and to the success of all his undertakings." We both emptied our glasses immediately.

Bishop de Mérode, while he was Minister of Arms under Pius IX, said, "It won't surprise you if I say that I admire Fr. d'Alzon greatly. The Pope often speaks to me about him, with tender affection. I like his forceful and honest way and his boundless devotion to the cause of the Holy See. He is the real Chevalier Bayard of the Church. He tells you plainly what he thinks. You always know where you stand with him. I congratulate you on being his friend. Let yourself be guided by him and you will never stumble."

Pius IX at Castel Gandolfo, during a private audience at which I mentioned that I had been a former pupil of Fr. d'Alzon: "Ah! d'Alzon! How is he? Still standing bravely in the breach?"

Fr. Combalot, in his original and off-hand way: "Close your eyes, stick your hands in your pockets, put your left foot forward, and let yourself be pushed by Fr. d'Alzon. Come on! He won't push you into a quagmire. And if, by your own fault, you ever fell in, he'd soon pull you out. He is one of the best fishers of men that I know of..."

In 1891, I was looking for Fr. d'Alzon's tomb in the cemetery of St. Baudille, in Nîmes. An old lady pointed it out to me, saying, "You don't have to pray for him. Seek his protection, for he is a saint. Everything I want, he gets for me."

The old porter of the bishop's residence in Nîmes, a former gendarme: "Ah! Fr. d'Alzon! When he goes by, I snap to attention and salute him as I used to do for my colonel. On his shoulders I see epaulets with large bullions. Don't you see them? I do."

The sacristan of the Nîmes cathedral was overheard saying to his

assistant one Sunday morning, “Fr. d’Alzon’s singing the High Mass today. Check whether the candles are straight and the altar cloths clean. And no wax drippings on the carpet! His feet always, inevitably, find them. In that case, run and hide before the end of the Mass and don’t let Fr. d’Alzon catch you.”

Mr. Prophète, who was the dentist at Assumption: “I’ve just extracted a tooth for Fr. d’Alzon. It was very painful. Before starting I warned him it would be. ‘My dear friend,’ he said, ‘don’t be afraid. I have some medicine that turns suffering into joy.’

‘What medicine?’

‘That crucifix hanging there on the wall. Come on! Let’s go!’”

To a young man, upset by his temptations, Father said, “You need some distraction. Music perhaps?”

“But I’m no musician.”

“That’s no problem. There’s a small instrument full of harmony but a bit monotonous. It may not please the body but it calms the spirit.”

“What is it?”

“It’s a pentacord, or to use less scientific terms, a discipline. I’ll give you a few lessons and then you’ll be on your own. It’s not a question of sharps and flats. The pauses are optional and depend on the inspiration of the moment.”

Bishop Patherson, titular bishop of Emmaus: “What a distinguished man, Fr. d’Alzon! His knowledge was broad and his views enveloped the whole world. I was amazed to hear him speak of England as if he had lived there for years. He seemed to have understood all classes of English society, from the aristocracy to the most humble. That’s rare for a foreigner and not very common even among my countrymen. Yet he had never come to England. He had profited by his friendly relations with Englishmen in Paris and especially in Rome. He was always reading all the serious works of our outstanding men.”

THE CORNERSTONE OF THE CHAPEL

The original chapel of Assumption College was on the right as you entered the main courtyard, next to Fr. d’Alzon’s office. The original entrance, on *de la Servie* Street, is now walled up but the cross above the

door is still visible. The single altar was on the side of the “Guinguette du Pré aux Clercs” facing the main doorway. The sacristy was in a space beneath the stairs between the chapel and the teachers’ library, which is now a reading room.

It was in this chapel that we held the memorial services at the death of Pope Gregory XVI. Mr. Cusse had concocted a large tiara of white paper, with gold crowns and pendants. The tiny ball that held the cross was only a potato wrapped in gold paper. We could find nothing better. Only three of us knew the secret, which is now probably being revealed for the first time. To this chapel was brought the body of Rev. Fournéry, monitor of the first division, who died of an aneurysm. He was the first to die at the College and the first to be buried in the vault, which contains among others Mr. Germer-Durand and Fr. Galabert. For years the venerable remains of Fr. d’Alzon were also buried here.

On May 1, 1849, feast of Saints Philip and James, a procession of teachers and students left the old chapel for the ceremony of the laying of the cornerstone of a new chapel. Fr. d’Alzon, vested in a cope, presided. The cornerstone was carried on a hand-barrow by four of the upper-classmen: Anatole de Cabrières, François Picard, Henri Roqueplane, and Paul de Pèlerin.

The stone, buried deep, contained a lead box with the official report of the ceremony, written by Mr. Germer-Durand and signed by Emmanuel-Marie- Joseph-Maurice-Daudé d’Alzon, by the teachers, and by the pupils who had the highest grades in conduct and application. The stone was placed directly beneath the location of the high altar. Later, when the chapel was enlarged and the altar moved back, this spot became the crypt, where Fr. d’Alzon’s body now rests.¹¹ He is thus resting on the cornerstone which he laid himself. This is most appropriate, because Fr. d’Alzon is the cornerstone of many works which, by God’s grace, form a majestic edifice.

This chapel is the real birthplace of the Assumptionists. Here, where Fr. d’Alzon so often prayed and meditated the beginning of his Order, the first Assumptionists took their first public vows. It is to this chapel

¹¹ This was true when the *Sketch* was written in 1896. In 1942, Fr. d’Alzon’s remains were transferred to the crypt of the chapel of the Oblate Sisters, Séguier Street, Nîmes.

that the thoughts of the sons of this illustrious priest and saint return. From his bones, covered by marble, there emerges, as from the bones of Elisha, a supernatural power which gives life, enkindles zeal, and fills the heart with love for God and the Church. We could carve upon the gravestone the words which Scriptures apply to a great prophet: "Throughout his life no ruler could shake him, and no one could subdue him. No task was too hard for him, and even in death his body prophesied" (Eccli 48:13-14)

THIRD SERIES

Editor's note: Canon Galeran's last *sketch* in the second series was published in the *Souvenirs* of May 30, 1896. For almost a year he remained inexplicably silent, despite repeated pleas that he continue writing. Only on April 24, 1897 could *Souvenirs* announce a third series.

In his introduction, Galeran admits his reluctance to start a new series. He claims that for serious reasons he should remain silent. He certainly seemed less enthusiastic, and it was only two and a half years later, on October 14, 1899, that the series came to an abrupt end.

STROLLING

It was in 1849, the first Thursday of May. Most students had gone out for the day. I was among those who had stayed in, and I hasten to add that we had done so because we wanted to, not because we were being punished. Toward late afternoon, Fr. d'Alzon asked me to take a stroll and recite some breviary with him. We followed the road to Saint-Gilles until Caissargues came into view, then we branched off on a narrow road that wound through the countryside.

It was a splendid evening. The sun was still quite high. The sky was clear and the air was calm. Everything seemed full of life, freshness, and gaiety. A soft, caressing breeze swayed the branches of the hawthorn trees, laden with perfumed white flowers. Birds chirped in the willows along a brook. Butterflies fluttered from flower to flower, from buttercup to daisy.

We were reciting the Benedictus of Lauds. Seized by the beauty of nature, Father suddenly stopped, lifted his eyes heavenward, and exclaimed, "Oh! my God! Your earth is so beautiful! How beautiful must your heaven be! Flowers open beneath your gaze. Birds sing your praises. Insects buzz to thank you. Only man seems unwilling to sing his Benedictus, or sings it poorly when he deigns offer it. Evil men forget you. They don't see the hand that so richly adorned the earth. But do even good men praise you as you deserve?"

Turning toward me, Fr. d'Alzon said, "My child, let us try to praise God properly. Let's not allow the sun, plants, flowers, and birds to surpass us in hymns of praise, in silent or expressed thanksgiving. We have a heart and a tongue: a heart to feel and a tongue to express what we feel."

When we had finished reciting the Breviary Father said, "As we recited the Psalms, we spoke to Our Lord and he spoke to us. These heart-to-heart talks have always struck me as being a foretaste of heaven. If you ever want a tiny taste of heaven, place yourself in immediate contact with Our Lord. In prayer or meditation, ask him for one of those intimate moments which he grants to those who say to him with faith and love, 'Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.' You won't necessarily hear his voice, but you will feel your whole being

filled with a sweetness, a balm which nothing in this world can even suggest. You will feel him near you. You will experience a holy thrill caused by his divine presence. You will say like St. Peter on Mt. Tabor, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here.' Great saints were ravished into ecstasy by the intensity of this joy. Suppose now such a moment prolonged into days, weeks, years, always increasing, according to the principle that 'every constant motion accelerates by its very nature, continually adding itself to itself.' It would not be heaven yet, but you would have a slight hint of what heaven would be like..."

Such spontaneous outbursts of Fr. d'Alzon did me more good than lengthy spiritual readings. I still remember them vividly. Just remembering them rekindles in my heart the youthful enthusiasm I felt whenever Fr. d'Alzon shared with me the beauty of his soul. He had often been enraptured by these moments with Our Lord.

"AN EXAMPLE FOR THE FLOCK"

The founder of the Assumptionists was the work of divine grace which wanted to raise up among us a truly great man. Bishop de Cabrières once said of Father's activity, "He was like a steed anxious to devour space, frothing beneath the hand of his rider." I would like to comment on these words by adding some personal impressions and recollections. Emmanuel d'Alzon's combative temperament could have made him the leader of armed battalions. He scorned fear. To the sound of trumpets, his battle cry resounded, "Thy Kingdom come!"

Of course he had pitiless opponents. That was to be expected. What was unexpected was the opposition by some friends. Yet that also comes in moments of greatest trial.

At an alumni banquet in 1872, Father had this to say: "Until now Assumption has played a role in the resurrection of society. I sincerely hope that its frankness, initiative, and devotion will always shine." That's the real Fr. d'Alzon! He has left on all his works these marks: frankness, initiative, and devotion.

We always knew where we stood with Fr. d'Alzon. His frankness was proverbial: some even accused him of being too frank. He never used tricks, dissimulation, or the underhanded methods often employed by small, narrow, hypocritical minds. He moved straight toward his

objective without detours. He spoke his mind boldly, in the pulpit, the confessional, friendly conversations, and his writings. He was not foolishly hasty or imprudent in his undertakings. Once he had carefully matured a plan in his mind, he openly announced what he wanted to do and immediately got down to do it. When he didn't succeed in one way, he tried another. Some people found fault and called him inconsistent. The fact is that he kept his objective clearly in mind but varied the means of achieving it.

The Assumptionists have inherited the spirit of their Father. Since they first began to act in the Church, they have known exactly what they wanted and have let everyone else know. They have changed their means but have never changed their objective. They remember their founder's words, "Zeal for the rights of God on earth and for the salvation of souls, such is the essence of our love... We care little for whatever concerns us, provided Jesus Christ be proclaimed." He also said, "We will work in any field where the Christian idea may legitimately develop." Fr. d'Alzon counted very little on his own resources; he trusted Divine Providence. He said, "I always like to trust madly in God's Providence, even if, abandoned by everyone, I should end up dying in some hospital." To his religious in 1868, he spoke these admirable words, "We are accused of compromising ourselves; this is our glory..." Such was the spirit of the founder and that of his religious family. The Assumptionists have had the courage to undertake, for the glory of God and the service of the Church, some tasks deemed impossible. They dared, and surprisingly their work has been crowned with wonderful success.

What can we say about the devotion of our revered Father, an outstanding man who sacrificed everything for the service of Jesus Christ in the Church, under the direction of the Holy See? He said himself, "The Church is something so wonderful that even the pens of the sacred writers seem incapable of expressing its grandeur, its richness, its power, its beauty, its glory."

Let us take note of the advice he gave his sons, "Have the boldness of faith...it matters little if we are called foolhardy. We carry within us the divine principle of resurrection and triumph if only we know how to be real Christians and real soldiers of Christ. An apostle is an obscure,

unpolished being, yet when he opens his mouth we sense that the word of God falls from his lips! What will we undertake? All those works by which people can be raised up, informed, moralized, all those works by which democracy can be Christianized.” The devotion of the great religious whose *sketch* I am trying to draw extends therefore to anything which can save souls and give glory to God. He was universal. His sons remain faithful to this orientation, and their zeal encompasses all kinds of ministries, barring none.

Another trait of Fr. d’Alzon deserves mention. He was always great; he was never of little importance... We saw him standing tall with cardinals, bishops, illustrious men of all types. His exquisite tact always kept him in his proper place. Although he always tried to take a humble place, he nonetheless dominated his milieu. People hovered around him and he always became the focal point of any meeting. We can honestly say that even though he tried to hide he could not be hidden. His astonishing prestige lasted all his life; he was always great. Since his death, he seems to be even greater and some people believe he was a saint.

As we draw the moral picture of this admirable priest, we realize that we are sketching the traits of his sons, the Assumptionists, because of their striking resemblance to their founder. As long as Fr. d’Alzon remains “an example for the flock” at Assumption, it will gloriously fulfill the vocation which God’s goodness chose for it in the Church.

BILLING AND COOING

Warm southern winds had blown over Assumption College. At assembly Father d’Alzon spoke to the student body: “Gentlemen, when I founded this school, I had no idea of turning it into a dove-cote. Still, quite a few among you have become like ‘doves loving each other tenderly.’ We hear billing and cooing, and these cooings disturb the peace, upset serious spirits, harm your studies, and turn some into ridicule. Right now we have a remarkable collection of pigeons and doves: strutting peacock-pigeons, awkward feather-legged pigeons, rather wild wood-pigeons, pigeons that give themselves airs, mourning doves, and naive, not to say silly, turtle-doves. All this is quite ridiculous, but I’ll admit that I am not in the least bit alarmed. Nonetheless, I ask you to shed your feathers and become men once

again. Play during recreation periods, stop sighing, cease being ridiculous.” Coatings ended and the winds changed direction.

UNUSUAL ART APPRECIATION

There was once a good, virtuous, zealous priest, who unfortunately was also narrow-minded and scrupulous, so scrupulous that he was dangerous to people, things, and even angels. This worthy priest was chaplain at a convent which I shall not identify. Over the door of the convent chapel was a fine painting of the Italian school. It was not a Raphael or a Perugino but it was very beautiful, a large painting over six feet high. It showed St. Cecilia seated at the organ, surrounded by angels who listened, entranced, to her playing. There were many of these celestial spirits. For the circumstances the artist had given them human bodies, with wings and a few wisps of garments. Not one had a complete garment, as the artist had not wanted to restrain their movements. Some floated above the holy musician; others were perched on the cornice of the organ; others stood near the keyboard. There was nothing improper in these poses, unless someone was determined to find something wrong.

The excellent priest was shocked. It is said that he closed his eyes when he passed beneath the painting, because one particular angel upset him, even scandalized him. This tiny angel stood near Cecilia’s stool, on tiptoe, trying to read the music over St. Cecilia’s shoulder. His back was toward the viewer, and as a faithful historian I must say that he wasn’t wearing winter woolies. This beautiful little angel had a sworn enemy.

One day, this sworn enemy, this dolt of a chaplain, could stand it no longer. He got a ladder and climbed up to the painting. With a rough rag soaked in some kind of caustic solution, he began to scrub the lightly-clad, inoffensive body of the surprised angel. The body was rubbed and scraped pitilessly, right down to the canvas. After an hour of rubbing, all that was left was a head, two wing-tips, and a foot, like stray fragments teetering on the edge of some mysterious abyss. What a heart-breaking spectacle! And to think that this barbarian was actually assisted in his dastardly deed by three nuns. Two held the ladder while a third held the bottle of acid.

Fr. d’Alzon knew the painting and had admired it long before, while

another priest with common sense had been chaplain. Indignant diocesan authorities were never able to make the holy Vandal admit that he had committed a foolish act. He even had the courage to boast about it!

This priest, who did not belong to the Nîmes diocese, at one time got into his narrow little mind the idea of starting a society for old maids. Why? I never tried to find out, because just the name of the projected society displeased me. This iconoclast, desiring to become a founder, wanted to meet Fr. d'Alzon and entreated me to introduce him. I did.

I waited in the courtyard of the College for the end of the excessively long meeting. I was stomping impatiently when finally Father's door opened. He came out alone and said to me, "Save me! I can't take any more! I've already said two rosaries while this fellow proposed his confused plans, absurd theories, and impracticable projects. Either you rescue me immediately or I'm going to rub out his plans with the same rag that he used on that poor angel." I easily rescued Father, then escaped myself.

SOLID VIRTUES

Fr. d'Alzon's reputation for sanctity rests on a universal conviction of the solidity of his virtues. Virtues show themselves in time of trial: the soldier displays his bravery on the battlefield and the mariner shows his courage amid howling storms that whip up the waves. Father stood the test. God and man could count on him: God, because he responded faithfully to grace; man, because he was always honest, loyal, unselfish. He rendered to God what was due. An example: his intelligence, when he broke with Lamennais as soon as the Pope had spoken. In a letter from Rome addressed to Fr. Vernières, Fr. d'Alzon wrote, "Probably I shall be required to sign an act of submission to the decrees of the Holy See. I am ready to sign whole-heartedly, without the least hesitation, anything that the Pope requests. I have only had one Lord, who is Jesus Christ. I desire to stay his disciple at the cost of any sacrifice, *usque ad effusionem sanguinis inclusive*." We know that prior to his ordination he signed the document in the presence of Cardinal Odescalchi, the vicar of Gregory XVI.

Father cared little about his own way of seeing things, and he set aside his pride and his own will in order to respond to a mere desire of

the Pope. Not only did he submit to the humiliating process of requesting governmental authorization for his congregation; he even signed the request on his knees. It was an act of heroic submission, by which he curbed his own will. Note that he had already written, “A religious tree thus uncrowned (by State authorization) loses its vitality because it is doomed to scorn.”

Having signed, he was truly admirable when he wrote to those who deemed his submission a great weakness, “I did not hesitate. I obeyed. The Superior of a Congregation has no other role, once the Pope has spoken. What is a colonel who discusses while a battle is raging? He’s a rebel and he deserves to be shot.”

The warm and generous heart of our Father “always burned toward heaven, like the fire in a censer,” to use Bossuet’s phrase. It was toward Jesus Christ and his Immaculate Mother that rose the sweet perfume of his ardent prayer, of his conversations, or the passionate hymns of a soul that often repeated the Apostle’s words, “For me to live is Christ.” His heart belonged to God alone. Once, only once, prior to his ordination was he affected by attractive, pure, human beauty. Even while the innocent image began to charm him, he saw the Lord pass before him, burdened by his cross. His heart went out to the Lord and he cried out, “Lord, your sullied and bloodied face is more beautiful than everything beautiful among creatures. I want to love only you, and you in the souls marked by your blood!”

What kind of manifestation was this? How did Father see it? I don’t know; I was never told. Was it imagination? I don’t know. How often God uses the faculties and powers of our soul, including imagination, to show the marvelous effects of salvation, without need of the miraculous.

People trembled when approaching him, when there was reason to expect reproach; but they always left him with their soul consoled, strengthened, even happy. Often I saw him ready to spring, like a lion set to leap. Then suddenly he would become calm, serene, smiling. He had mastered himself!

Yes, he knew how to conquer himself. I would like to recount here some events that show how Father corrected his faults, how Canon and Vicar-General d’Alzon and Augustinian monk d’Alzon presented two different characters while remaining the same person. Fr. d’Alzon

inherited the prejudices of ancient nobility as well as precious traditions. Without ever despising anyone, he felt that illustrious families with coats-of-arms, superior by rank and blood, were also superior by spirit, dignity, generosity, devotion, and heroism, by everything, in short, which differentiated the higher from the lower classes.

At College, we students from the middle class noticed that Fr. d'Alzon, without being unjust, leaned slightly in favor of students from the nobility. It took him a long time to realize that the offspring of the aristocracy could dissemble, lie, be vulgar, lack dignity and loyalty as much as the sons of laborers or farmers; or that feelings of honor, heroism, devotion, noble pride were not the exclusive attribute of counts or barons.

From the beginning of the College, Fr. d'Alzon as headmaster surrounded himself with the scions of southern nobility. To do this, he kept the school fees high, inaccessible except for the very wealthy. He was not acting from any motive of vanity. He acted under the prejudice that the aristocracy would furnish him with a better class of outstanding men, apostles, priests, to serve the Church and extend the reign of Jesus Christ. In the aristocracy he thought he would find "souls ambitious to preach Jesus crucified."

We know that, after many years' experience, he admitted he had been wrong and would henceforth turn "toward the Gentiles," as St. Paul had done, and address himself to the lower classes, which were simple, energetic, filled with faith, and capable of immense sacrifice. This clever strategy gave us the alummates. Who today does not see the hand of God in the foundation of these training schools for priests and religious? On the other hand the aristocracy of Assumption College has furnished many able men, of great merit, to society, but it has furnished only a few religious and priests.

ADVICE TO A NEWLY-ORDAINED PRIEST

Father wrote from Paris to a former student who had just been ordained, "My dear friend, you are now a priest! You have received awesome power over the Body of Jesus Christ. May you treat it most respectfully, with tender care. You now serve Jesus as did Joseph and Mary. At the hour of your death, may God grant that you be able to say,

‘I have faithfully kept what was entrusted to me.’

“Take good care of the tabernacle and all the objects connected with the Holy Sacrifice. Take care of yourself, your rectory, and your living quarters only after you have made the church — when you eventually get one — as worthy as possible of the Blessed Sacrament. May the Master always be first. He is sensitive to the respect that is due him. How many priests shamefully neglect him! The Virgin Mary will be grateful to you for continuing her mission to Jesus.

“After the Body of Jesus — I really should say: at the same time — take care of his Word, i.e. preaching. St. Augustine said, ‘The Word of God is no less than the Body of Christ.’ The priest’s jurisdiction over the Word of God is derived from his jurisdiction over the Body of Jesus Christ, as St. Alphonsus says. Treat your preaching with respect and faith, caring only for the glory of God and the good of souls, and effacing yourself as much as possible.

“I would like to quote again from the great bishop of Hippo, whose teachings have always been my rule. Note this fine passage: ‘Whoever listens negligently to God’s word is no less guilty than he who by his neglect lets the Body of Christ fall to the ground.’ If this can be said of listeners, what care must the preacher take? Bossuet said somewhere, ‘We are obliged to treat the Sacred Word and the Sacred Mysteries equally well.’

“As you can see, my dear son, my congratulations on your ordination take the form of advice. Of course I am very happy, but I love you too much not to tell you what seems useful for the performance of your grave priestly functions.

“I embrace you with all the affection which you know, and I ask you to remember me at the altar.”

AN EMBARRASSED GUEST

In all the refectories of the Assumptionists, we can read in large letters the sentence of the great Doctor, Augustine, which forbids speaking evil of absent people.¹² The sentence cannot be found in all the

¹² Editor’s note: St. Augustine’s expression reads:

*Quisquis amat absentum rodere vitam He who takes pleasure in defaming
Hanc mensam vetitam noverit esse sibi. the one absent is not welcome here.*

residences of bishops, nor in all rectories, nor in the dining rooms of many fine people. But everyone knows and appreciates it. Father d'Alzon once recalled the warning and energetically defended the character of one of his sons.

A small group of priests were dining in the bishop's residence in Nîmes. There was Bp. Plantier and Frs. d'Alzon and Boucarut, vicars-general, Fr. de Cabrières, and Fr. Thiben, general secretary. There was also another priest, a stranger whose name I am glad I have forgotten. He was a tall, lean, stiff fellow who had the complexion of a mulatto. Some people have said in my presence that he was a very mediocre type person. All this would seem unimportant if he had not been ultra-Gallican and a passionate admirer of *Ami de la Religion*, published by the famous Fr. Scisson, whom Louis Veuillot punningly called Saucisson, (*sot Scisson*).

This priest was one of the bishop's guests. He had just traveled through a number of dioceses and was bursting with news. At that time the newspapers made frequent mention of a letter written by a young pastor of the Montpellier diocese. The letter was anything but Gallican, and our gossiping priest spoke indignantly about it, thinking he would thus please the bishop of Nîmes. From the letter, he moved to the person of the writer. He stated categorically that the clergy opposed him and found fault with him, that his bishop had done well in punishing him, and that the Church was not for him. Everyone let the unrelenting critic express himself without interruption. When he finally stopped, Bp. Plantier said, "Beware! You're speaking here in front of friends of this priest from the Hérault whom you judge so severely..."

"Yes," said Fr. d'Alzon, "I am astonished, Father, to hear you say that the Church is not for him. Has the Church told you? In what corner of the sacristy did you study your canon law? Who represents the Church and speaks in its name? Its head and spokesman, the Pope. The priest you are talking against, whom you don't even know, whose reputation you are destroying, is one of my former pupils and I love him as a son. It is truly regrettable to hear you, a priest, speak thus, when the person you are attacking is absent."

The unfortunate gossip was devastated and looked imploringly toward Fr. de Cabrières, seeking his help. But de Cabrières said, "Don't

you know that this priest was my comrade and is still my dear friend?"

Dinner was almost over. They ate dessert hurriedly, almost in silence. The poor guest took no coffee but rushed to the railroad station to get back to Montpellier where he was starting to preach a retreat to some religious community. He could now speak from experience about the disadvantages of tongue-wagging. The episode proves once again that no friend was more faithful than Fr. d'Alzon.

VICTOR CARDENNE

While Fr. Alfred (Mariage) was my superior at Kadikoy, he asked me (but didn't oblige me) to write a monograph about each of Fr. d'Alzon's original disciples, or at least to write a detailed essay about each. I have decided to do so, choosing events connected with Fr. d'Alzon. Thus I will not wander outside the scope of these *Sketches*.

In 1847, Victor Cardenne, history professor at Assumption College, decided to satisfy a long-felt desire to visit the famous Beaucaire Fair. He prepared carefully and had a special outfit made according to his own design and choice of colors. He was original, even eccentric, and we could believe that the suit would be unusual. He was supposed to take the 8 A.M. train from Nîmes to Beaucaire, on a Thursday. He thus had to cross the main schoolyard during the seniors' recreation period. Games ceased as we all awaited the traveler's appearance. Even Fr. d'Alzon stood expectantly in the doorway to his study.

When Cardenne appeared, he was as radiant as the sun, and even more colorful and variegated. To describe him adequately, I have to start from the ground up. We noticed his shoes first. He was wearing yellow shoes, white gaiters, white trousers and vest, and a large, soft-pink bow tie. He had a stiff collar and a top hat with narrow brim. His short coat was olive green and he had chamois gloves. On his chest, on starched and shiny shirt lay a large grey stone, about the size and shape of a small hazelnut. Jewelers call such a stone cat's-eye. From the right pocket of his vest hung a shiny steel watch chain. It ended in a key in the shape of a dagger, stuck into a buttonhole. From a coat pocket, there stuck out a saffron-yellow silk scarf. In his gloved hand he swung a light, flexible cane with gold pommel.

If this detailed description surprises my readers, I assure them that,

except for certain stylistic changes made now in 1897, it is an exact copy of my notes of 1847, when I was only fifteen years old. Such was Victor Cardenne leaving for Beaucaire Fair. This was the getup of the future Assumptionist, one fine summer day in 1847. Shouldn't I say a word about his physiognomy? Let's finish the portrait now that I have the brush in hand. He had blond hair, pomaded, and long enough to cover his ears. Short beard and mustache. Quite a prominent nose. Tiny blue eyes, Intelligent, cunning and mischievous. You can imagine the amusement of us roguish students, who expected something curious, but nothing so far-fetched. Reality surpassed even the fondest dreams of our southern imaginations.

Even Fr. d'Alzon could not contain himself and was the first to break out into laughter, which spread to all the watching students. "My dear Cardenne," said Father, "you have been most successful in disguising yourself as some new kind of parrot. If you ever appear on the fairgrounds in such plumage, you will be a smashing success. The Beaucaire urchins will dog your heels and you will be the great curiosity of the day. I beg you, do not cause laughter at the expense of Assumption. Take the ten o'clock train. Meanwhile exchange your strange apparel for something more somber and in better taste."

Father could speak that way to a teacher in front of the students, because they adored Mr. Cardenne. Moreover, the atmosphere at the College then was such that even such a reproach would not diminish the prestige of a person. Cardenne, whose humility was even greater than his eccentricity, joined in the general mirth. Then, like the good novice that he already was, he obeyed his superior and promptly went to his room. When he came back, he was dressed almost irreproachably and he scooted to Beaucaire.

It almost seems as if I have described the first chapter of faults at Assumption, in the open air, before a non-regular, unmerciful community, but one which was edified by conduct that could serve as an example even for fervent novices.

VICTOR CARDENNE, AGAIN

After my *sketch* on Victor Cardenne, I really should come back without delay upon this first Assumptionist religious. We saw him in a

somewhat ridiculous situation. It is now only fair to high-light his serious character, filled with fine religious virtues.

Cardenne had a comical bent. Assumption alumni have often said that they've never met his equal on any stage. They also add that he used his comic talent to exercise a very real apostolate among the students. Can we ever forget the show where Cardenne suddenly appeared in the audience, dressed as Satan? Yes, a Satan with horns, black face, stormy brow and flashing eyes. Crooked hands and an immense, snaky tail, with the end of which Cardenne gracefully stroked his beard. You should have seen Fr. d'Alzon. He was as surprised as everyone else by this apparition, and his laughter rang out loudly.

Hoarsely Satan commanded silence. Fixing phosphorescent eyes on one after the other he made an examen of conscience for each, with wit, with charming malice, and especially with tact. He revealed certain quirks, recounted certain facts, and repeated certain conversations. Yet no one could be angry. Everyone guffawed, Fr. d'Alzon and Mr. Germer-Durand even more than the students.

I must stop this; my pen is running away with me, drawing me again toward the comic character when I promised that I would concentrate upon the serious aspect. Let's back up a bit. In order to speak about old-timers in a satisfactory way, I need great freedom. I am somewhat intimidated by two survivors, Frs. Hippolyte and Pernet. Their presence has constrained me, until this very day, because I cannot say about them everything that I know. I am uneasy with this restraint and seek ways to get away from it. Why should I forego the pleasure of praising Frs. Hippolyte and Pernet, despite their very probable protestations? Would it not be, for my part, a sort of exemplary expiation for all the worries and vexations that this disagreeable but loving student caused them?

Right now, however, it is Cardenne that I must deal with. We have Jules Monnier's book, *Le Maître Chrétien*, written about him. When the book was published, we were greatly interested because as contemporaries we could add to it what we knew and what it lacks details about his life. Today, *Le Maître Chrétien* cannot help us to know Cardenne. The brochure contains writings, meditations, prayers, examens of conscience, but it does not recount conversations or actions. Jules Monnier shows us his friend absorbed in prayer, while we would

like to see him acting and talking.

As we know, Victor Cardenne had had a very tempestuous youth. He had strayed far down the path to iniquity and disorder. Having returned to God, by the purifying and transforming action of grace, he fortunately fell under the influence of Fr. d'Alzon. Shaped by Father's skillful direction, he rapidly rose to a high degree of holiness. His pure and delicate conversation was deeply impressive. Fr. d'Alzon had rescued this soul from the mire and had worked upon it, purifying it, ennobling it, clothing it with angelic beauty. "Grace is a wonder worker." One day, Cardenne was seized by a dangerous temptation, as the events of his past suddenly rose before him. Terrified, he lit his oil lamp and held his hand over the flame. His index and middle finger were so badly burned that for months he could not use his hand.

I saw his unbandaged hand and learned the reason for these wounds. Everyone else, except Fr. d'Alzon thought it was only the result of an accident.

The walls of Cardenne's room were spattered with blood, as a result of merciless disciplines. One summer — I don't remember the exact year, but I was still a student — Cardenne came to live with us at Montpellier for three days. He was waiting for Fr. d'Alzon to return from Lavagnac. They were supposed to go together to Le Vigan. Every night Cardenne gave himself a cruel discipline, to the point that the walls, the furniture, and especially the bedclothes were spotted with blood.

When Fr. d'Alzon arrived, he stayed at the Hotel de Londres to be near the stagecoach office. He sent me a note requesting me to dine with him and to bring Cardenne "with arms and baggage." Before we sat down to table, Father drew me aside. "Tell me frankly," he said, "What has Cardenne done since his arrival?"

"He went walking."

"Fine. Then what? Did he make penances?"

"Atrocious, dreadful, cruel ones. He beat himself and left blood all over."

"My friend, there's no need to pile up adjectives. Speak moderately. He made penances. He should not have bespattered the walls of a house

which was not his. I shall speak to him.”

He must have really scolded Cardenne, because after dinner, just before taking the coach, Cardenne came, crestfallen, and apologized. I have also seen this humble man in the homes of the poor. He made their beds, washed the children, emptied and cleaned their pots, all their pots. I have seen him climb the slope to Notre-Dame de Rochefort, his bare feet bloody. Although he was harsh and severe with himself, he was a model of mildness toward others. What wise and penetrating advice he gave us while we were in college. At Assumption, he would go from schoolyard to schoolyard, urging children to play, because he knew that while children play they think no evil.

I shall return later to the life of this truly holy man, who is still too little known. What treasures lie hidden in the first days of Assumption! In the very first number of *Souvenirs*, on page seven, we can read: “Victor Cardenne, died in Fontainebleau, December 11, 1851. Converted like St. Augustine, gifted with a fine intelligence, he shared our Patriarch’s fervor for the conversion of sinners and to that end used all the resources of his zeal and spirit. He was the first who opened the door of the earthly Assumption to the Assumption of Heaven.”

HOW TO TREAT CHILDREN

Everyone knows how greatly Fr. d’Alzon esteemed the ministry of education. On this subject he had lofty and supernatural ideas. He founded a teaching congregation; the Assumptionists had a college as their cradle; the first religious were professors and monitors. This glorious origin must never be lost sight of.

Since the foundation of Assumption, I have diligently collected much advice about how to treat children. These ideas were often expressed in short, precise, practical sayings by Fr. d’Alzon. I noted down only what I heard personally or what I gleaned from letters addressed to me. What I have to say has never been published, although the archives of Assumption must contain a great deal on this subject. Allow me to recount what use I made of this precious advice. All the missionaries whom I questioned all responded that nothing is so important, vital, great, or worthy as the formation of children.

When I directed schools in England, my great preoccupation was to

make the teachers understand the greatness of their vocation, and be aware that their vocation required a supernatural spirit, a dedicated heart, and patient, prudent, delicate action. In order to train these teachers better, I translated Father's advice, as found in my notes. I added what seemed to be of local importance, as required by the character of English or Irish children. In this way I wrote a small book, tastefully printed, which I could present to all the teachers. English and Irish children thus got a formation that was basically Assumptionist.

With the aid of my notes, why shouldn't I now write a *sketch* on the subject? Here is some of what Fr. d'Alzon had to say:

"An innocent child is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Respect him as you would the tabernacle.

"Pray often to the Guardian Angels, whose care you share *ex officio*.

"Children should see in you something more than just a school-master.

"Have exact and supernatural ideas of your vocation and believe that the education, care, and supervision of children is not a ministry beneath your priesthood, since the angels themselves exercise it.

"Don't let yourself be discouraged by faults or sins. Don't forget that beautiful souls can be found in unattractive bodies and that there are in every sinner the makings of a saint.

"Always see in children souls marked by the blood of Jesus Christ. Think of the feelings that St. Joseph must have had when he saw the Christ Child.

"Do not discourage children by imprudent reproaches, and beware of making them lose the feeling of their own dignity.

"If you use contemptuous terms in speaking to a child, he will often resign himself and accept the loss of his reputation. He then becomes stubborn, arms himself against advice, and goes from bad to worse. Watch out for this.

"When a child is young, he lets himself be molded like wax. These first impressions then harden and cannot be obliterated. Consider therefore with what tact and wisdom a good teacher should impart his teaching.

"Watch yourself carefully. Children are clear-sighted and can soon

discover your weak points and your flaws. Be natural, not posturing. Poseurs are ridiculous and detestable.

“Be even-tempered. Nothing ruins a teacher so much as bizarreness or uncontrolled emotions.

“Especially, respect the child. The ancients used to say, ‘We owe supreme reverence to children.’ These ancients were pagans. Shouldn’t we do better and see souls which God has entrusted to us, souls dear to him as his precious jewels?

“Avoid stiffness, but above all avoid familiarity, preferences, and special friendships.

“Do not seek to hear children’s ‘confessions’ under the pretext of knowing them in depth. Don’t try to discover their intimate secrets, which are the exclusive domain of the sacred tribunal. Otherwise you’d lose your prestige. It is a dangerous and dishonorable practice. Either the child will take offense or the secret will create between the teacher and the child an extremely dangerous intimacy. Grave indiscretions have begun in this way.”

As you realize by now, these brief passages are not a treatise on education. Yet they are enough to show us Father’s spirit and his thoughts about the art of educating children. Father himself was a perfect model of a Christian teacher. Always dignified, affable, distinguished in manners, without affectation, he treated us in such a way that we had to respect ourselves. Serious and reserved, he nonetheless acted in a charming way. He was a friend and a father.

We loved him and he loved us. He cherished some lads especially, but so well and tactfully, and for such evident reasons, that less favored boys were never tempted to jealousy. I want to repeat what I have already said many times: What great good this admirable teacher did to us! The Assumptionists are indeed fortunate to have inherited the spirit and the teachings of such a founder, such a Father, such a saint!

A QUIP

In Paris, Fr. d’Alzon got into an omnibus and was agreeably surprised to find there a friend, Bp. Bessieux, Apostolic Vicar in Guinea, who was traveling in simple priest’s garb.

“Ah! Bishop,” said Father, “I’ve known for some time that you were

a bishop *in partibus*. I am charmed to see you today as a bishop *in omnibus*.”

THE WELL AT ASSUMPTION

Fr. Louis Prouvèze was one of the fine men of the early Assumption. One day he came out with an expression that made Fr. d’Alzon laugh heartily.

It had been decided that the well at Assumption, whose pure and delicious waters have refreshed generations of Assumptionists, needed cleaning... Fr. Prouvèze was placed in charge of the work which consisted in pumping out the water and removing the mud in the bottom. Such a job, in the language of Southern France, is called *curing* a well.

The well at Assumption, fed by an abundant spring, was not easy to dry up. Many attempts were made during several days. Finally the workers decided that it was impossible to dry up the well. Fr. Prouvèze, disconsolate, announced to Fr. d’Alzon, “Father, we have to give up...the well is *incurable*.” Father fell into a fit of laughter, as he did later each time the well was mentioned.

AMBITION VS. LOYALTY

In writing the life of a great man who was in contact with many people of all ranks, characters, and merits, it is necessary to speak of these contemporaries in order to highlight the image of our hero. As in a painting, it’s the background and the surroundings that serve to emphasize the primary subject. In a biography, the writer is often embarrassed by the presence of secondary characters, sometimes rather wretched ones, which need mentioning. Occasionally the historian needs to deal lightly and briefly with certain events. He must let the dead rest and have consideration for those who have disappeared into the shadows. But sometimes, in order to consider the achievements of upright men, he must reveal the actions of schemers. Fr. d’Alzon’s biographer will have to denounce certain hidden things. Undoubtedly he will write with calm and moderation. But must he remain silent, under the pretext of sparing this eminent priest’s contemporaries? Must we always cover up or omit certain aspects of Father’s character, because if we mention them we are also forced to mention the pettiness or ambition of men who would have served the Church poorly if his firm hand had

not prevented it? Those who blamed or persecuted Father did not restrain themselves. Must we, his sons, fear to defend his memory, just because in doing so we would need to reveal the actions of some shabby characters? Not at all! Father had some implacable enemies. Here is a picture of some of them:

There was a vacancy among the titular canons in the diocese of a bishop who was Father's friend. A priest of little merit wrote to Fr. d'Alzon a very obsequious letter begging him to use his influence. At that time I was preaching in the city where that priest was one of the pastors. He came to see me, hat in hand and bowing, to ask me to back up his request to Fr. d'Alzon. I mention this only to explain how I knew about the whole affair.

Father somewhat coldly acknowledged having received the request. One day he met the priest in question on a street in Montpellier and he told him: "Father, you sent me a request. I am glad that I've met you because I can frankly tell you what I think. Not only will I not help you in your maneuver, but I shall use whatever influence I have to prevent you from obtaining any ecclesiastical dignity. Believe me, work instead at sanctifying yourself. Make every effort to clothe your soul with the virtues of a good priest instead of covering your shoulders with silk and ermine. Do you understand what I am saying? Farewell."

I was present when another priest sought to be named honorary canon, after having preached a Lenten series which, in the opinion of everyone, had been poorly preached. Fr. d'Alzon asked him, "Why do you want an honorary canonship?" "It would give me more prestige in the pulpit," said the priest.

"Father, I respect as much as anyone else the dignities that the Church has instituted. Given your answer, allow me to say this: always preach Jesus Christ and never yourself. Seek conversions, not theatrical effects. Prepare your sermons by study, penance, and prayer. Then you will have the real prestige of the Apostles which neither an embroidered rochet nor purple buttons can give you. Do you think that St. Paul would have preached better and more effectively if he had covered his shoulders with imperial purple?"

A very ordinary preacher was already twice an honorary canon, but he had higher aspirations. Despite the purple buttons on his cassock he

was unhappy. He wanted to be a bishop. Fr. d'Alzon was very powerful and this preacher wrote asking for his support. Father, who knew him well, answered, "Monsignor, you have been preaching a long time. You have yourself written reviews for the newspapers, reporting the immense success of your sermons and including some of their finer passages. When the day comes that serious persons publish a list, of your converts, I shall then consider helping you, if I think you able to serve the Church. At the moment I can do nothing for you except pray God to help you live and die as a good priest."

Just as the first two never became canons, the third never obtained a miter. The fourth priest I am mentioning desired a miter too. He finally got it, but died after having been relieved of the burdens of the episcopate. At the death of Bp. Cart of Nîmes, Fr. d'Alzon was elected Vicar-Capitular. Seeking the sympathy of such an influential man, the imperial government consulted him directly about the choice of a successor. Practically, the choice of a new bishop was Fr. d'Alzon's, and many candidates looked toward him. Let's note here that no one ever thought that the Vicar-Capitular would accept the miter and staff himself. If anyone thought it, he never said it.

Somewhere in northern France there was a white-haired cleric who for years had nourished the inner conviction that he would be a fine bishop. Even disappointments had not wiped out the desire. This man of venerable age had the courage to write to Fr. d'Alzon asking his help in getting the see of Nîmes. He naively listed his personal qualifications and numerous sermons which had gained for him some renown. He vaunted especially a series of sermons to women, which the women had had printed at their own expense. He added a detailed program which he would follow once he was, as he said, "seated on the throne of Fléchier."¹³ One item of the program: he would maintain d'Alzon as Vicar-General. Can you imagine Fr. d'Alzon receiving such a letter? He acknowledged receiving it, in a cold, dignified, severe letter.

When Fr. Plantier of Lyons was chosen as bishop, the disappointed candidate again wrote to Father, and his letter can best be summarized by these words quoted from it: "You don't know what you have lost..."

By refusing to sponsor such a candidate, didn't Fr. d'Alzon render a

¹³ Fléchier was a famous 17th century preacher who became bishop of Nîmes.

real service to the Church? When, finally, a stray miter fell on the head of this aged cleric, he declared in one of his first official acts that he was the adversary of Fr. d'Alzon and of all his endeavors.

I shall stop here although I could say much more. I just wanted to show what kind of people Fr. d'Alzon had as enemies. I am probably the first to reveal these things and I do not regret it. Those I speak of are dead and judged. So is Fr. d'Alzon. We the living have a certain right to form our judgment concerning them. I shall not recount how Fr. d'Alzon was not named Vicar-Capitular after Bp. Plantier's death, nor why, having been Bp. Besson's Vicar-General for a while, he felt the need to resign. He wrote to me explaining the situation and the reasons for his resignation, and asking me to show the letter to Cardinal Manning. I did.

Like the great saints, Father had in his lifetime three clearly distinct periods: the period of trials, the period of unpopularity, the period of triumph. From the kind of people who became his enemies, we can get a clear idea of his loyal and frank spirit. His triumph is obvious from the prosperity of the works he founded. Our heart tells us that his triumph is complete in heaven, amid all his sons. Let us hope that the Church will officially proclaim it some day!

ON SUPERIORS

Younger religious have learned from their elders, along with their family traditions, how strict and forcible their founder was on the question of superiors, the trustees of authority. Fr. d'Alzon was broad-minded, but he often repeated that broad did not mean limitless and that obedience was the binding force of religious life.

"The human nervous system," he said, "maintains equilibrium, unites the various members into a vigorous whole, and makes firm, precise action possible. The sovereign will acts upon the nerves, gives them movement, or slows them down, without experiencing the least resistance. Such is the marvelous organization of our body..." And he added, "I want our allegiance toward our superiors to be not only loyal but heroic, despite the obvious faults in these same superiors."

Father was pleased to repeat St. Peter's words, "Be respectful and obedient...not only when they are kind and gentle but also when they are unfair" (I Pt 2:18). More than once he reminded us, his first disciples,

that as the apostle was speaking of superiors in the natural order, all the more should we obey those who lead us by virtue of religious vows.

One day, in a conference, he was commenting upon the passage of St. Denys to Demophilos to warn him “that he would deserve great blame and would burden his conscience unless he came to the aid of those in authority, even when the fault might be on the side of authority.”

A priest, alumnus of Assumption, disagreed with his bishop on several points. Fr. d’Alzon wrote to him: “Be patient and prudent and be careful of what you say. Concerning the respect you owe your bishop, don’t be afraid to go beyond strict duty. Go even unto heroism, if need be. If such is your conduct, God will know of your sacrifice. It is I who give you this advice, I who have been struck on your cheek...”

The situation became so serious that it was necessary to appeal to Rome, and the priest left for Rome to sustain his appeal. Father then wrote, “You are in open warfare with your ecclesiastical superior. The newspapers have taken notice of the fact. The Pope will judge and you will unhesitatingly submit your judgment to his judgment, whatever it may be. More than ever I urge you to be prudent. Never stray from the straight path of respect for authority, even when it is obviously at fault. God wills it so. I count on your good will. But I still worry about your fiery blood and your impetuosity.

“Never forget this: in the spiritual order, whenever we fight with a superior, there are always undesirable effects even when justice is on our side. We may win, we may be completely justified in the eyes of a supreme authority, but we must even then remain humble and moderate. At all costs be deferential and generous in the process of vindicating your rights. Sometimes, as in your case, nothing should stand in the way of seeking one’s rights. But let us never stray from the principles of humility, charity, and dignity.

“I have often lingered over the passage in Genesis where Jacob struggles with an angel. The angel is clearly Jacob’s superior and it is he who provokes the struggle. The combat lasts all night; Jacob wins and the angel admits it. Nonetheless the defeated angel touches Jacob’s hip-socket, dislocates his hip, and Israel will limp for the rest of his life. There is a mystery here, and we must not stretch the application of Divine Scriptures. Still, experience itself proves that there are always

after-effects of any struggle against authority.”

We can say that for Fr. d’Alzon the cornerstone of the moral order, of the birth of his college, and later of his congregation was absolute respect for authority, no matter who the superiors might be. The religious always had the right to appeal to major superiors, never forgetting their own condition nor the spirit of their vow of obedience.¹⁴

GOD’S PORTION

Before becoming a secular priest, Fr. Barre had been a professor at the School of Medicine in Montpellier. Even as a young doctor he had acquired an international reputation because of some extraordinary cures and his great surgical dexterity. In the medical arts, he was a genius, sympathetic, very intelligent and cultured, and a skilled diagnostician. He was at the peak of his career when the news broke that he was leaving medicine to enter the priesthood. Dr. Combal inherited his patients, and I mention the fact here only because during many years Dr. Combal took care of Fr. d’Alzon, with all the dedication of a true friend.

Dr. Barre’s decision caused a shock wave in society. People couldn’t believe that it was true. Eventually they had to accept the fact, especially when Dr. Barre left for Rome to study theology and returned the following summer clad in a cassock. After ordination he begged to become the chaplain of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Montpellier. He refused to accept any salary for the job. It was through me that he asked the bishop for the position. After many years spent in this work, he died, leaving a reputation for sanctity even greater than the fame he had had as a surgeon.

Although this vocation had long been prepared in secret, it surprised everyone and was decried by many unbelievers and by a few Christians. Both parties accused Fr. d’Alzon and his friend, Fr. Berthomieu, of

¹⁴ Galeran’s note: In this *sketch* the author has been uncomfortable** because he had to speak of things dealing with religious life. To excuse him, people must remember that the first disciples of Fr. d’Alzon received from him a certain primary initiation, of which the spirit of the Assumption is the flowering in all its splendor.

** Editor’s note: Probably Galeran’s uneasiness came from the fact that the priest who disagreed with his bishop was Galeran himself.

having robbed the scientific world of a skillful and famous man. Fr. d'Alzon especially was the target of many vicious tongues. At first he let things pass. Later, when the occasion presented itself, he took the opportunity of presenting his own views. Once he had to preach to a large group of women, many of whom had been patients of Dr. Barre and who deplored his change to what they called "a deplorable vocation."

Among other things, Fr. d'Alzon said to these women: "God is the supreme and absolute Master of everything, because he created everything, men and things, spirits and bodies. 'All things are mine,' says the Lord in Exodus 13:2. He has a right to the homage, love, and sacrifice of his creatures, in a word, to a cult summed up in one word: obedience. Reason alone, without the help of revelation, already teaches us this.

"Among men, there are no exceptions to this law of homage. It is for the powerful and the weak, for rich and poor, for wise or ignorant. It obliges the healthy and the sick, those who walk straight or those who limp, the sighted or the blind, the beautiful as well as the ugly. As you can see, there is no exception, even for doctors.

That is why Dr. Barre, having heard God's call, felt that he must obey. You, or many among you, blame him for having obeyed. Why? Because you will be deprived of his care and wise counsel. Then you prefer yourself to God.

"You accuse me of having given advice in this case and of having rushed things. If I gave advice, it is probably because I was asked. If I hurried things along, it was because it has always seemed a good thing to me to get up and go once God has spoken, in any way. I declare here and now that I regret nothing.

"You complain of Dr. Barre's departure, because he was too skillful, too useful, too famous professionally, to abandon medicine for the priesthood. What a perfidious, false, unjust, ungenerous attitude toward Divine Providence! You want to fling back to God, as his portion, what you don't like, what you don't find useful, in order to keep for yourselves and the world what is pleasant and advantageous to you. These are the choice offerings we reserve for God! To him everything that is vile, ugly, repulsive, deformed, morally or physically. To us

everything that is perfect and attractive.

“Unfortunately, many Christians think and act like worldly people; they separate God’s portion and the world or the devil’s portion. God’s portion is always the stingiest. To God, the poor, the blind, the halt, the imbecile. Here’s an ugly girl; let her enter a convent to become a bride of Christ. Here’s a rich, beautiful, polished girl; we’ve got to keep her as an ornament of society. If she should ever feel called to religious life, we’ve got to squelch that vocation. By what right could God deprive us of such a charming creature? Let him take instead her younger sister who squints and is none too bright. Then we will submit to his will.

“This is the language of worldly people who do not have the Christian sense of which St. Paul speaks, ‘We are those who have the mind of Christ’ (I Cor 2:16).

“With utmost frankness I say that I love deformed bodies as much as I do others, because of the soul within, a soul marked by the royal blood of Christ. But, during all my life, I shall strive to offer to God the best that I can find among the sons and daughters of men, as soon as I discover in them a sign of vocation. I shall die content if I succeed in filling convents with young virgins snatched from the world in order to be consecrated to the service of prayer and expiation of the world’s sins. To be sure, I prefer a virginal sacrifice, in the full flower of life, in the sweet flowering of a pure heart, rather than the offering of an old roué and of an old, exhausted, disillusioned socialite, who renounce only what they have been unable to keep and consecrate to God, the sorry remains of a life which God gave them that it might be entirely at his service.

“The crippled, the ignorant, the ill-favored are as precious to God as are late converts. But we do not have the right to settle God’s portion according to our own whims and passions. That would be to say to God, ‘Lord, you take what we have ceased to love.’ I beg you, let us pray for the conversion of sinners, but let us also pray for the conversion of the good, so that God will elevate their spirit, broaden their hearts, and give them a real sense of the Gospel...”

The man who spoke these words with eloquence and authority was himself a living example of what he preached. He had generously offered to God his fortune, talents, physical beauty, all the advantages of

a splendid social position, and all the dignities that he could easily have grasped by simply stretching forth his hand. Our Father had the mind of Christ; he lived as a monk and died as a simple priest. In his last moments, as he saw the heavens open before him, he could have uttered the words that summarize all his life: My God and my all!

ENDING A CONTROVERSY

Reverend Puaux, a Protestant pastor in the Cévennes, had attacked with more insolence than knowledge, with more vulgarity than literary talent, the sermons of a Jesuit missionary preaching in Mende. The controversy between the minister and the Jesuits of Puy-en-Velay became quite intense, and the exchange of letters made the fortune of some newspapers. This was in 1853. Rev. Puaux had been somewhat roughly handled by his skillful and learned opponents. He therefore exchanged his musket for a cannon; he stopped writing letters and published a book attacking the Catholic Church.

The book, really only a brochure, was absurd from start to finish. It said nothing new, nothing noteworthy. It resurrected the old war-horses of the early Calvinists about "The Whore of Babylon," "The idolatrous and adulterous woman," "The corruptor of Nations," etc. It was ridiculous, and Rev. Puaux was so ill-advised as to mix Fr. d'Alzon's name in the controversy.

Father responded promptly. His answer was witty, sharp, proud, and scholarly. He began thus: "The Pastor Puaux, after having impregnated a long correspondence with the Jesuit Fathers with the acrid odor of overheated bile, has now emitted an even stronger odor which comes from the very bottom of his being. Does it come from his brain? This perfume is not that of roses, jasmine, lavender, violet, or orange. It is distilled stinky Puaux. To read his brochure, we have had to have not courage, but heroism."

After such a beginning, Father went on to shake up, thrash, and flatten his opponent, turning him to ridicule. Pastor Puaux became the laughing-stock of everybody, even his parishioners, and had to move away.

HUNTING RABBITS

Most Assumptionist communities raise rabbits, which they eat on some holiday or feast. How can we explain the phenomenon of Assumptionists and rabbits living side by side or even under the same roof? Where does this pronounced taste for rabbit meat come from? Without really seeking an answer — which may come anyway by the end of this *sketch* — I would like to describe a rabbit hunt organized and directed by the founder of the Assumptionists. Although the hunt was brief, it allowed Father to draw from it some practical lessons.

One day in September, 1859, Fr. d'Alzon awaited me at the château of Lavagnac. We were to meet in order to discuss serious matters in an atmosphere of calm and solitude. No spot seemed better suited than the tree-shaded lanes of the château. I arrived afoot from Montagnac, about five o'clock in the afternoon. Standing on the steps of the château, Father saw me from afar and ran toward me up to the great grilled gateway.

“Why did you walk? You should have notified me and I would have sent a carriage.”

“I wanted to walk some of the way to enjoy the countryside, the fresh air, and the beautiful weather.”

“Are you tired?”

“Not at all.”

“Then come and take some refreshment, and then we will go on a little excursion that will interest you.”

“Where?”

“You always want to know why, and how, and where! Trust me. You'll see. You'll see. It won't be far.”

I was in the dining-room, munching, when Father returned carrying two fine double-barreled shotguns.

“They're loaded with buckshot,” said Father. “Here's yours.”

“What do you mean, Father? What am I supposed to do with this, and what are you going to do with yours?”

“It's quite evident, my friend. First, you will carry your gun very carefully. Then you will follow me and shoot when the proper time

comes. For my part, I shall do exactly as you do, maybe even better. We're going hunting. There are some wild rabbits in a nearby field that belongs to my father. We're going to kill one and eat it roasted for breakfast tomorrow. You'll kill it. You'll shoot first, although I have some doubts about how successful you'll be."

We left at dusk, precisely when Jack Rabbit comes to nibble among the thyme. We arrived at the field and Father, looking around carefully, suddenly stopped. "There they are," he said, "coming out of their warrens. Let's go to the right around this hillock and we'll have them in fine range, right in front of us. Come on! Do you see that big one near the little olive tree? Aim! Shoot! Come on, shoot!"

I fired and thought I was right on target. But the rabbit hopped away and disappeared. I can still see him and can still hear Father laughing mockingly.

"Missed, my friend! Shamefully! I thought so as soon as I saw you raise your gun. You're clumsier than I thought. Here's another one hopping by. I'll shoot. I'm aiming for the head..."

He shot and the little beast took one hop and dropped dead. We didn't have a dog, so I ran and picked up the prey. A fine shot, right in the head. I had never thought of Father as a hunter. I knew that Mme d'Alzon vaunted his skill. The first bird her dear Emmanuel had killed, she had had stuffed. It's the same bird, a jay, I believe, that the young Emmanuel holds in the portrait given to Fr. Picard by the Count of Puységur.

If Fr. d'Alzon had quit with killing the rabbit, that would have been fine enough for me. But once the hunt was over, I became the target of a barrage of reproaches seasoned with laughter. "Listen," said Father, "you missed your rabbit just as you miss a lot of things. You are too hurried, too impatient, and too moved by the thought of making a good shot. Despite many good qualities, you often miss your target because your faults paralyze your qualities. As we return to Lavagnac, I'm going to give you some lessons on shooting that might be of use to you, even in the moral order, provided you make good use of my advice.

"The main qualities needed to shoot well are: nerve, attention, calm, good eyesight, and power of concentration. To advance toward perfection, you need to see things properly, be gifted with sound

judgment, act with calm, precision, and energy.

“I read somewhere that a famous Englishman, Benjamin Richardson, wrote a book about physical exercises to develop muscles and train fine athletes and good shots. In his book, he says that four things are absolutely essential: first, avoid anything that harms or weakens; next, have a calm temperament; have a praiseworthy objective; and finally, have regular habits in everything. He adds that it is also necessary to avoid alcohol and tobacco. That’s what athletes have to do, according to an expert.

“Besides that advice we must place the prescriptions of St. Paul, ‘All the fighters at the games go into strict training’ (I Cor 9:25). All that just to gain a corruptible crown. What must we do, we who aim for an incorruptible crown? We have to follow the same rules. Change the words a bit and you have the rules for Christian athletes: mortification of the senses, patience, zeal, regularity. It is essential to practice detachment from even the smallest things in order not to be the slave of anything useless, even though it might in itself be innocent.”

That’s what Fr. d’Alzon told me along the road back to the château. When he had finished, I said to him, “Father, you’ve strayed quite far away from rabbits.” “My friend,” he answered, “you should consider yourself very fortunate that I did, because then your clumsiness is forgotten. But don’t forget my lessons on shooting.”

I have not forgotten them, as this *sketch* proves. The incident also reminds me of other incidents dealing with rabbits...At Assumption College, the rabbits were kept in a large cage and the students fed them bread at breakfast and afternoon snack time. After the Congregation was founded, Assumption rabbits appeared almost as soon as the monks did. Fr. Brun was the rabbit-breeder, at the country home of Canon Couderc de la Tour-Lisside. There Fr. Brun discovered the secret of fattening rabbits and of having Brother François Picard lose weight. He succeeded in piling up huge deficits, of fifty percent, because rabbits that cost him two francs, for instance, were sold in the open market of Nîmes for one franc or a franc and a half. That did not last long, and Fr. Brun proved in Australia, England, and the United States that one can save souls without having the qualities needed to be a successful rabbit-breeder.

In 1896, in Kadikoy, I admired Brother Marc’s fine rabbits. He

showed them to me one by one, cautiously opening the door of the cages. You would have said that it was a real rabbit monastery: the rabbits were as fat as monks, and almost as fat as canons. At Phanaraki, rabbits were needed and were there. In Jerusalem, the scholasticate has its rabbits and they are treated like lords: they have summer quarters, winter quarters, and shelter against the rain. At Notre-Dame de France, the care of rabbits has always been entrusted to intelligent and gifted brothers. Their line is already quite long and has its own traditions.

THE ART OF TALKING TO GOD

Today is the feast of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary, November 21, 1898. When the noon *Angel us* bell proclaims the great mysteries of faith, it will also commemorate the eighteenth anniversary of the death of Fr. d'Alzon.

He is dead! But we do not say that he has left us. His memory is still alive and his protection still noticeable. When friends have died, we like to return to the past of their existence because their memory is dear to us. We must then stop at their last moment and say, "It is finished. He is gone. He is no more!" But in the case of our patriarch it has not been thus. A new life has sprung up from the tomb itself. It might almost be said that the River of Time, rather than dry up at the tomb, has instead paused at the tomb, grown deeper and stronger in order to flow on as a majestic river, wide and profound.

Does not the Assumptionist family find its fertile source in Emmanuel d'Alzon's tomb, from which it comes forth with a new and brilliant life? Already the number of former students and first disciples of this great educator is beginning to dwindle. The hair of those remaining is already whitened by time; their footsteps become slower and will soon stop. On the other hand, the number of religious, men and women, grows greater. The small family of yesteryear has become a multitude.

When younger brothers question these remaining witnesses of those first days, let the elders explain how their souls, shaped by this eminent priest, imbued by him with the spirit that produces Christian men, have not weakened in the face of trials. They have remained courageous in adversity, calm amid the tempests, serene on sad days, always happy and

satisfied in God's service because God's life has been Assumption's life. The old disciples of Fr. d'Alzon are prouder of the title of "son of Emmanuel d'Alzon" than of all other honors and dignities they may have received throughout a long career.

The young know all this and avidly seek to hear about the beginnings. I use the term, beginnings, because at Assumption nothing concerning Father belongs to the past. The dead speak still! Let us make him speak, we who knew him and heard him. Let us tell a new generation all we know about the thoughts, words, and actions of this man whom God gave us as Father, teacher, and model.

Fr. d'Alzon said to one of his penitents, "Here is my method of speaking to the Divine Lord present in the tabernacle: I begin by saying, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.' My Master and Teacher, I need some light upon an important matter. Books can tell me nothing. Science remains mute or else gives confusing and uncertain answers. Wise men declare themselves incapable or ignorant. I am going to examine this problem and discuss it in your presence, Lord. I seek only your glory. So I dare ask your ineffable goodness to enlighten my mind, direct my judgment, strengthen my will..." These are his words, verbatim.

Father confessed that this way of solving all kinds of difficulties had always been successful. Although he sometimes arrived at a solution different from what he had foreseen, he was always on the right track as if impelled by some gentle but irresistible power.

In the course of a conversation with the venerable Curé d'Ars, I submitted to him a case of conscience about which Fr. d'Alzon had already given me advice. Fr. d'Alzon's solution and that of Fr. Vianney were identical and expressed in almost the same terms. I mentioned this one day to Archbishop Ginouilhac of Grenoble. The wise prelate, who was a fine theologian and a friend of Fr. d'Alzon, said, "I presented myself some very difficult cases to the Curé d'Ars. He gave me solutions that at first seemed contrary to all the rules. When I examined the cases more profoundly, I found his solutions remarkably precise."

I can say exactly the same thing about Fr. d'Alzon, concerning many cases which I submitted to him during a long ministry, cases which had

stumped more than one eminent theologian or learned canonist.

ON THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER

Fr. d'Alzon was especially famous as an educator of souls. He knew the human heart to its very depths. His eye was keen and penetrating; his judgment, sound; his direction, firm, precise, and practical. That was how he formed men of character. It is interesting to follow his actions at the College in Nîmes in order to understand the spirit which he later gave to his religious congregation.

The College was the training school for the Assumptionists. The Oblate Sisters and the Little Sisters of the Assumption were also formed according to a model in the mind of Fr. d'Alzon, with the modifications required by their way of life. At Assumption College we had outstanding teachers, carefully chosen by Fr. d'Alzon. They were learned, prestigious men, academically speaking, but they were especially men of great moral quality and Christian virtue.

For instance, there was Germer-Durand, very serious and erudite, yet tactful and delicate when he had to reprimand us. Who can forget the brilliant Jules Monnier or the hard-working, heroic Victor Cardenne? Who can think without pleasure and gratitude about the brave and dedicated Hippolyte Saugrain or the sweet and sympathetic Etienne Pernet? Of this band of valiant Christians, the first educators at Assumption College, only two survive: Frs. Hippolyte Saugrain and Pernet. Long may they live! The first students of the College are themselves getting along in years. In their old age, they will have a joy to rejuvenate them: thinking about their dear college and the professors who educated them. To such educators, they owe that spirit of Assumption which keeps them fresh and sprightly, despite the years and the trials of their life. They remain hale and hearty because, as youngsters, they were trained to be moderate in everything and faithful to their duty.

With such teachers, we lacked neither advice nor direction. They were more our friends than just our teachers. If I had the right, I would say to all the young religious now in ministry: if you want to succeed in forming the character of the boys you teach, imitate your predecessors at Nîmes, your paternal home. Let their spirit be yours; their method,

yours; their virtues, yours. At Assumption you can succeed only if you act according to the spirit of Assumption. Having said that, I stop, because I am trespassing on someone else's domain, without his permission.

Fr. d'Alzon's influence was unlike that of any one else we ever met, whatever his authority, talent, or personal prestige. He knew us better than anyone else. He watched us, studied us and was very successful at keeping us on the right road. He could read us like an open book.

His tact was so great that although he held us tightly in check, like a good horseback rider, he left us the satisfaction of believing we were advancing by our own efforts, by the effects of our own energetic will. We loved him so deeply and had so much confidence in him that we willingly let him turn each page in the book of our conscience to discover our secrets. And we still feel the warmth of his guiding hand upon us, even after so many years.

When I became an older man, Father once told me how he prayed night and day for his children, asking God to give him, for them, enlightenment and direction. He cared especially for those who seemed to have a religious or a priestly vocation. He once said, "You will never know how many tears I have shed to obtain the perseverance of some students who today are secular or religious priests." Am I not myself, to some extent, the son of some of those tears?

Father had an irresistible way of bringing us back in line and of encouraging us to keep the resolutions we made. He didn't deliver long sermons. He had the precious knack of finding the right word at the right time. He had the skill to change our greatest fault into our greatest virtue. When we were tempted or had weakened, he put us back on our feet. His advice was sound and hit the nail right on the head. We left these meetings enthusiastic for everything great and noble.

I have seen the sons of aristocratic families glory in the honor of washing the hands and feet of repulsively dirty children and ridding them of the vermin that crawled over them. I could name some students who spent the better part of their holidays sweeping out filthy hovels inhabited by some poor paralytics abandoned by everyone.

Let me add, to the glory of Fr. d'Alzon and our other teachers, that the innocence of the children of the old Assumption College was simply

marvelous. I am convinced that it was almost miraculous. Father, by his prayers and terrible penances, drew down upon us exceptional graces. He surrounded students with safeguards they knew nothing of but which they later understood and appreciated, with gratitude that will last all their lives.

Should it surprise us then that the College became the birthplace of a religious congregation? Do we not find in these monks the spirit and virtues of the early Assumption College, in the high degree of perfection which characterizes a true religious? The first sons of Fr. d'Alzon recognize that they are at home among these brothers, the Assumptionists, who consider them as their older brothers.

A FAITHFUL FRIEND

Today, let us penetrate into the heart of Emmanuel d'Alzon to admire him as a faithful friend. The Holy Scriptures say: "A faithful friend is a sure shelter, whoever finds one has found a rare treasure" (Sir 6:14). God loves us and he is faithful. We flee from him, we offend him, our ingratitude is without limit. Still, he remains the same unvaryingly. As soon as we find our way back to him, we discover that his love for us has not changed.

I don't know whether there has ever been in the world a heart more sorely tried, more abused and tortured than Fr. d'Alzon's. At the same time, I am convinced that no man's heart was ever so unshakeable in its fidelity. Please take note that I speak here of Father's friends, not his enemies. Among these friends, these sincere admirers of Emmanuel d'Alzon, there were some who deemed it their obligation to oppose his plans, criticize his zeal, and place obstacles to the development of his works. Later, such friends wanted to renew the bonds of friendship which they had believed broken forever. They then saw Father come toward them smiling, his open heart filled with a friendship that nothing had been able to alter. More than once this kind of faithfulness had impressed people who were prejudiced against Father. Some men who at first had been very unsympathetic fell under Father's influence and became his devoted friends.

All proportion kept, we can apply to Fr. d'Alzon the words of the Gospel, "He had always loved those who were his own in this world, but

now he showed how perfect his love was” (Jn 13:1). Let us not forget how he had to struggle energetically to master himself. He was naturally proud, haughty, accustomed to be waited upon. Those who knew the young, brilliant Vicar-General of Nîmes know that he was well armed against his opponents. In his hands irony was a frightful weapon. He had a way of standing, with a certain air of disdain which terrified an adversary. Yet, in everyday life this extraordinary man was a kind friend, simple and constant. If we place Fr. d’Alzon, the secular priest, alongside Fr. d’Alzon, Assumptionist, it’s always the same man. But what a change divine grace had worked upon this personality!

I knew very intimately, better than anyone else at Assumption, a former student who told me confidentially things which I can now speak about. I shall not reveal all I know, but just enough to prove my point. Fr. d’Alzon tenderly loved this child, whom he had accepted as a pupil at the very outset of Assumption College. Father’s paternal love was repaid by a sincere filial love, but it is only fair to say that the young man caused some problems for Fr. d’Alzon. His cherished hopes for the boy were doomed to disappointment and his plans for him destroyed. Would not such conduct tire even the truest friend and cool even the warmest affection? What more was needed to break the bonds of such a friendship? Fr. d’Alzon remained faithful. He waited patiently and magnanimously until the end. He did even more: with un-believable dexterity and without ever showing his hand, he continued to direct the lad who had thought he had shaken off all direction. Father smilingly said to someone: “I’m letting the bridle loose, but I still hold it tight enough to stop him from jumping outside the right way, even though I let him wander a bit.”

I really should stop here because I’ve said enough. But why be silent when the curtain hiding the past is pulled aside, allowing us to see another scene which will strengthen my thesis? One day in 1859, in Montpellier, Father and I were walking under the trees of the esplanade, in front of the citadel. Our conversation dealt with the inconstancy of human affections. We spoke about scheming, calculating friends, narrow-hearted, afraid to commit themselves. There were many examples that we could have mentioned. Our conversation was prompted by a letter which Fr. d’Alzon held in his hand. The letter was

not addressed to him and I do not know how he got hold of it. It was written by a bishop whom I shall not identify, who criticized some of Father's actions. His zeal was called imprudence and his actions were termed foolish. There was also an implication that he should withdraw from diocesan administration.

Father smiled as he read the letter. Not one word of criticism fell from his lips. When he had silenced me for daring to show my indignation, he made the following remarks which deserve mention: "Jesus Christ is the only perfect friend, the only one we can count upon on cloudy or sunny days. He is the model of faithfulness. So he was yesterday, so he is today, so shall he be during the centuries to come. He has never rejected anyone. He appreciates our tiniest services and rewards our good will. I say this because I know my Master's heart. If Judas had given a sign of repentance or shown the slightest desire to return, made the least movement — his Savior would have run toward him with arms open wide.

"I know how much John was loved because of his purity. Nonetheless it was not the virginal heart of John that was chosen as the cornerstone of the Church. I am deeply moved when I consider the fidelity of Jesus toward Peter, who denied him thrice. Despite this fault, Peter was not expelled from the band of apostles. He had been false to honor, but he was forgiven because he regretted his fault. Could he still consider himself head of the Apostles, or still be considered an Apostle?

"I am touched when I read St. Mark's gospel, written beneath the watchful eye of Peter. He finds a very moving expression: 'The angel said to the women, "Go say to the disciples and to Peter..."' That means: especially do not forget Peter! I don't need much imagination to see Peter receiving the unexpected message and crying out: 'Really! He said to you, "And to Peter"?' He could hardly believe it. My friend, how delicate and faithful is the heart of our Divine Master." We can add nothing to Father's words. Have we succeeded a little bit in sketching the "faithful friend?"

PERIWINKLES

I would like to mention something which I never noted down and was reminded of by mere chance. Last spring (1899) I was returning from

Bethlehem just as the sun began to set below the horizon. Rather than follow the road, I had cut cross-country in order to enjoy peacefully the perfumed air, the greenery, and the flowers. I suddenly chanced upon a mass of splendid periwinkles, fresh and bright against their dark green leaves.

This sight produced in me something akin to a supernatural vision and I stood stock still under the influence of confused ideas. Memories of a distant past flooded my soul and the great figure of Fr. d'Alzon seemed to stand before me. Reminded by the periwinkles, I thought of a past event which I hasten to share with my young brothers.

Unless I am mistaken, it was in the early spring of 1858 that I traveled from Montpellier to Gignac to preach. I had promised to visit Fr. d'Alzon at Lavagnac where he was resting. We had decided to spend a day together. I arrived in the early morning. After dinner and the usual visit to the chapel, Father suggested that we walk in the park of the château, which was in all its springtime beauty.

I wanted to talk about a number of projects that I was involved in, but as soon as I began speaking Father silenced me with that irresistible air of authority which came to him so naturally. We would discuss these matters later, when he came to Montpellier. I understood then that he wanted to speak about something else, and in fact he launched into what might be considered a discourse on religious life.

I must admit that at first I thought the topic ill-chosen, far too serious for a day's holiday in the country. I would have preferred to disport myself and laugh because on the preceding day I had been preaching on a very serious subject, or so I thought. My vexation lasted only a moment, and I soon fell under Father's spell and unresistingly let him fascinate me.

I regret that at the time I did not record the vignettes of the monastic patriarchs which he drew with a sure and delicate hand. I had never heard anything so wonderful as his ideas about the distinctive character of the works of the great founders of Orders. He admired most St. Basil, St. Augustine, St. Benedict, and St. Norbert of Magdeburg. During this discourse under the chestnut trees, I was initiated into the doctrine of the famous mystics of the Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, and Carmelite schools. Of course, Father dealt only rapidly with the main

currents of this mystical theology, but his points were made so strongly, precisely, neatly, that they later proved of great use to me in the difficult ministry of the direction of souls. I still remember some of the ideas developed by this creator of a new Order.

I remember his explaining the kind of religious life he wanted to see established in the Church: a very strong and universal activity united to regularity of monastic observances. Though he praised the Jesuits, he deplored the fact that they had put aside the most solemn functions of the sacred liturgy. No other religious service and no pious exercise can equal the beauty of the Church's ceremonies. No public prayer is as good as the psalmody or the chant of the Divine Office in choir.

Fr. d'Alzon added: "The Church is a monarchy whose invisible King is present beneath a mysterious veil. The sacred presence needs the attendance of a court and all the splendors of royal pomp. *Quantum potes, tantum aude* . . . The Ceremonial contains, as rubrics, rules to regulate this pomp or exterior cult. I want (here I am quoting Fr. d'Alzon verbatim) religious who leave the choir in order to mount the pulpit, men who leave the cloister and show a determined visage, where we can see, not the signs of fear, but the fearlessness of Faith ..."

It is difficult to express Father's earnestness during this talk. His words gushed forth. I listened enthralled. I had never seen him so enthusiastic. We continued our slow walk and our conversation. Suddenly, at a curve in the lane, under an old oak tree, we saw a beautiful bed of periwinkles. Father said, "Here's a wonderful image of a monastic community. See these fine flowers! I am annoyed that they were Jean-Jacques Rousseau's favorite flower. The poor man never saw in them what I see. God, who created the periwinkle, created it to speak of his glory. Isn't it a fine illustration of what I was just telling you about a religious family?"

"Look at it carefully. From the quiet center of this plant grow flexible, strong branches, filled with sap. The branches radiate around their point of departure, their cradle. They push forth and advance, laden with leaves and flowers. They penetrate everywhere, overcoming obstacles which they end up by covering with their greenery.

"The branches, note well, have life and energy only through their connection with the plant itself. And the flowers! Examine them closely:

they are the color of humility, like the violet. What I admire most about them is that they raise their head high, not hiding it beneath the leaves. They boldly present themselves to the sun which gives them light and makes them fertile.

“My friend, I admire periwinkles. In my view, they symbolize my ideal of a religious Congregation. Let’s not forget that Jesus himself used a plant to explain the organization of his Church when he said, “I am the vine. You are the branches.”

I must stop here. This *sketch* must not become a volume. I have quoted Father as accurately as I could, even though I have no written notes to help me recall the episode. The details are accurate, but they are only part of the story. The talk lasted so long that I was unable to leave Lavagnac that day. Charmed by Fr. d’Alzon’s eloquence, I forgot the time of my departure, much to the amusement of Fr. d’Alzon who, of course, had been careful not to remind me of it. He even declared with a smile that this was “already a first success for his teaching.”

Do you now understand my feeling when I suddenly saw the patch of periwinkles along the road from Bethlehem, reminding me of the periwinkles of Lavagnac? Between the two events lie forty years.

THE FIGS OF LAVAGNAC

It is hard to date what I am about to relate. I’ve forgotten. Maybe I never knew. It cannot be before 1857 nor after 1859, and it happened when figs first ripen.

The sun was beginning to peek through the night vapors when the Pézenas coach stopped before the door of the Convent of Providence in Montpellier. At precisely that same moment, the chaplain (Galeran) was coming out, on his way to the church. The stagecoach driver gave him an elegant little basket. From beneath its cover stuck out some fresh green leaves.

“Driver, where does this basket come from?”

“From Montagnac. Left at the relay station. Picked it up in passing.”

“Who sent it?”

“Don’t know. But I was told to give it to you without fail.” The coach rolled away and the chaplain went to his rooms, deeply puzzled. He did

what many people do when they receive a letter or a package. Instead of opening it, he turned it upside down and every which way. He didn't recognize the handwriting of the address. Where did it come from? From Fr. d'Alzon? Montagnac is close to Lavagnac. But, for as long as any man could remember, Fr. d'Alzon had never sent anyone a basket. A basket! He was too great a lord to do that! He sent only letters! Once, for the feast of St. Henry, he had sent me a box, sealed with the family seal, containing a new discipline and a card which urged me to "use it generously."

Such were the thoughts of the chaplain concerning the mysterious basket. Finally he opened it and beneath a layer of leaves found a note in Fr. d'Alzon's handwriting. "My dear friend, please accept the first fruits of Lavagnac. I picked them myself at dawn. They are ripe and sweet. I need to sweeten you up before discussing something with you. I shall arrive by tomorrow's coach, shall say Mass, and ask you for breakfast. Later in the day, I shall go to Nîmes."

Beneath the note and the vine leaves were the figs. Not the usual market figs, but dark, ripe, succulent figs, really royal fruits. A whole basketful of exquisite fruit, picked by Father and a note announcing his arrival! The beginning of a red-letter day!

The next day came. The coach approached, bells ringing and whip snapping. It stopped and Father, as nimble as always, stepped out. He looked as fresh as the figs and a thousand times more delicious!

"Father, you should have sent me the note hand to hand. I might not have opened the basket immediately. You ran the risk of not finding me here."

"I know you too well for that! I know you by heart! You! Receive a closed basket and not open it right away? Never! You are incapable of such abnegation. You opened the basket, didn't you? While you were reading my note, weren't you already eating one of the figs? Come on, be honest!"

"Father, you wanted to say Mass, I believe?"

At once Father became serious, preoccupied, and for some moments remained silent. Then, with emotion in his voice, he said, "Yes, I want to say Mass and I want you to serve it yourself as soon as there is no one

else in the church. I need to be alone.”

While he was vesting, he said in a low voice, “Can you keep a secret? There’s a matter in which I need the mediation of the souls of Purgatory. At the Memento of the dead I shall pause for awhile. Let me be. If I remain absorbed more than five or six minutes, shake me and warn me to continue the celebration.”

We know that Fr. d’Alzon, while remaining very dignified, said Mass rapidly, in twenty minutes. A Memento of five minutes was something extraordinary. When he arrived at that moment, he seemed lost in fervent prayer. Hands folded, head bowed, eyes closed. His body was immobile, like a stone statue. It almost seemed as if he had stopped breathing.

After seven minutes by my watch, I touched his arm. Immediately he opened his eyes and extended his arms. Without hesitation, as if there hadn’t been the least interruption, he pronounced the next words of the liturgy, “*Ipsis, Domine...*” and the Mass continued.

You understand very well that at breakfast neither of us mentioned what had taken place. Father seemed jovial, sparkling with wit, letting fly charmingly malicious barbs at the one who today, for the first time, publishes things he has never forgotten, because he keeps their precious memory in the depths of his soul.

APPENDIX

FATHER PERNET

The Little Sisters of the Assumption have written to ask me to write my recollections of their revered founder. I do so with pleasure for the edification of the daughters of this admirable founder, and as a token of my gratitude toward my teacher and my friend.

Claude-Etienne Pernet arrived at Assumption College in 1847, aged twenty-three. I was then in the first division, i.e. the seniors, and we had Mr. Pernet as our monitor. In a letter to Fr. Hippolyte, I have told how the new monitor was loved at first sight.

His sympathetic exterior, soft voice, charming timidity, and tender heart endeared him to us. We avoided giving him the least trouble. This was rather heroic on our part, given the usual relationship between monitor and pupils. We even went out of our way to put him at ease and make his job easier. He realized it and seized every opportunity to let us know subtly how much he appreciated our efforts.

I can still remember when Mr. Pernet was introduced to us. It was during the breakfast recreation period, while we were still lined up in ranks, that Fr. d'Alzon presented him to us. He wore atop hat and a dark maroon frock coat. He had a beard and his hair was long. He snuffed frequently, a habit he later gave up.

We called him "The Phantom." Why? Here I must correct slightly something that Fr. Picard said to the Little Sisters and which was then published in the *Souvenirs*. Here are the circumstances in which the nickname "The Phantom" appeared: Soon after he had arrived at the College, Mr. Pernet suddenly disappeared. The students asked where he was and were told that he was sick in the infirmary. What illness did he have? No one would say. That puzzled us and piqued our curiosity. We had the idea of asking the doctor as he passed on his way to the infirmary. He told us the truth: Mr. Pernet was seriously ill with typhoid fever. He was in isolation and no one could see him.

Finally, one day, two months later, he reappeared wrapped in a large cloak. It was the first time he ventured outside. He looked like a ghost, very pale, emaciated, with sunken eyes. "It's a phantom," cried out

Edgar de Balincourt. The word seemed appropriate and the nickname stuck among the alumni.

We soon noticed a close friendship developing between Etienne Pernet and Hippolyte Saugrain, two men of very different character, but with hearts equally tender and generous. They were to be Fr. d'Alzon's joy and the glory and honor of the Assumptionist family. These two teachers understood each other and their friendship in God and for God ended only with death.

I said earlier that Mr. Pernet was timid. One day we had gone on a hike to the woods of Campagne and had picnicked on the grass. It was extremely hot and we had drunk more than our usual ration of white wine, mixed with less water than usual. We had also been foolish enough to eat large quantities of wild onions that grew in the woods. The white wine and the onions, aided by the sunshine, betrayed us and we were all somewhat tipsy. We danced, we sang, we screamed. No menagerie ever produced such a racket.

The monitor, somewhat alarmed, told us we would have to start back. We grumbled, we screeched, we stamped our feet, hopped around and refused to line up. I'll admit that I did my share of protesting. I ask Very Reverend Fr. Picard's permission to remind him, with deepest respect, that he was there also. I shall say no more.

Poor Etienne Pernet was pale and bewildered. He came to me, grabbed my arm and said, "You too, Henry! This is mutiny, revolt. No one will obey me!"

"Not at all, Mr. Pernet. We're only having fun, sing along with us..." I saw immediately that he was deeply upset. The word spread rapidly, "Enough! Mr. Pernet is displeased." Right away, order was restored and our return to the College was very calm.

Another incident may interest and edify. It's somewhat longer to tell. One September day in 1849, during the holidays, Mr. Pernet and I planned a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Rochefort, some forty kilometers away, between Nîmes and Avignon. I hope I am not indiscreet in revealing some details; they seem necessary to my story.

Already in 1845, Fr. d'Alzon had confided to me that he planned to found an Order. In 1849, I probably knew more about it than did Mr.

Pernet. In a way, I was a novice: subject to obedience and to some rules and practices that I shall call conventual. Because of that, Etienne Pernet, in private, acted almost respectfully toward me. He said that we would make the pilgrimage on the condition that he would be completely under my authority. He said this very seriously and I accepted without the least difficulty. If I try to analyze my attitude at the time, I arrive at this conclusion: having myself to practice obedience toward Fr. d'Alzon, I must have relished the idea of being for a while somewhat superior to someone else.

Unfortunately, on the day of our planned departure, I was in Cette. I missed the train and arrived in Nîmes only late at night. At the College, I discovered that my companion, after having waited for me, had left alone. What was I to do? People tried to dissuade me from leaving, but I left anyway in the hope that the pilgrims, according to Assumption custom, would stop to sleep at the inn of Lafoux.

It was a dark, moonless night. It was scary and the road seemed endless. Finally I arrived at the inn. I knocked and the door was opened.

“Do you have such and such a traveler here?”

“Yes.”

“What time did he ask to be awakened?”

“At three.”

“Fine. Give me an adjoining room and wake me first. Don't tell him that I'm here.”

I slept fitfully in a chair. Three o'clock soon came. I got up and waited for my friend to leave his room. He opened his door; I opened mine. He cried out and we threw ourselves into each other's arms as if we hadn't seen each other in years. He was agreeably surprised, as he had given up hope of my coming. We began our journey in silence and meditation. He had brought along a book and as soon as dawn allowed he read I don't know how many pages. My God, it was long! I would willingly have sat down on the piles of crushed rock by the side of the road. But we were supposed to receive communion at the sanctuary and my friend pushed on mercilessly, without slowing down.

At the foot of the hill, Mr. Pernet began to remove his shoes. He wanted to go up bare-footed. He was exhausted and I was even worse

than he was. I would never have the strength or the energy to walk the rocky path bare-footed. So I used my authority for the benefit of my friend and also for mine. I forbade his act of mortification.

Do you know why we undertook this pilgrimage? No one knew except Fr. d'Alzon, who had authorized it, Mr. Pernet and me. Probably, to this very moment, no one yet knows the reason, which I reveal here for the first time. We went to ask God, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, for Etienne Pernet to receive the grace of religious vocation in the Assumptionist Congregation, which Fr. d'Alzon was thinking of founding.

In the mysteries of Divine Providence, doesn't the origin of the Little Sisters go back to that pilgrimage? What a pity there was no second intention for the perseverance of the second pilgrim! My friend's prayers could have obtained anything! In 1850, shortly after this pilgrimage, Henri Brun, a priest, Victor Cardenne, Hippolyte Saugrain, and Etienne Pernet signed an important document in which they promised to follow Fr. d'Alzon and to accept whatever future Constitutions Rome would approve for the congregation.

THE CRUCIFIX

After our pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Rochefort in September, 1849, Etienne Pernet wanted to visit Avignon to see the famous ivory crucifix by Jean Guillermin. It used to be kept in the chapel of the hospital, but is now in the city museum.

It is well known that the Crucified Savior's face, remarkably, has two distinct but harmonious expressions: resignation and sorrow. Therein lies the great merit of the work, made by a genius enlightened by faith.

When he saw the crucifix, Etienne Pernet seemed seized by a sudden and profound impression. He remained silent, absorbed in contemplation. His eyes stared at the sacred face; his trembling lips tried to utter a prayer. Suddenly he burst into tears and fell to his knees, as he kissed the feet of the crucifix. No longer able to contain his emotion, he cried out: "That's it! That's it! Here he is as I saw him in meditation, as I've always imagined he'd be. This ivory breathes and speaks to me. My God! You are beautiful, in this state of suffering accepted for us ..."

Obviously we were deeply moved by this spontaneous act of faith.

The Sister who was showing us the crucifix leaned toward me and said, "This gentleman must be a saint! See how he loves Our Lord."

FR. PERNET'S COMMON SENSE

Fr. d'Alzon once said something that seems to describe Fr. Pernet's common sense so well that I quote it at the beginning of this *sketch*: "We must recognize a primary characteristic of our Institute: simplicity of means. Supposedly, common sense is the rarest thing on earth. Is it paradoxical to say that the rarest thing in Catholicism is Catholic common sense? That's why we seek it as our trademark." That's what the Founder said. He wanted God to be served with frankness, simplicity, and generosity. Let's see what his disciple did.

Etienne Pernet, as layman, priest, and religious, was always a man of energetic and simple common sense, in his manners, in his words, and in the means he chose to conduct his marvelous enterprises. He had the spirit of Assumption in all its perfection. This spirit, directed by "Catholic common sense," produced in the Church a strong tree, the branches of which shelter in their coolness and peace so many people who never knew the sweet joys of the soul before they were gathered and nursed by a Little Sister of the Assumption.

Let me give you an example of Fr. Pernet's common sense and practicality... At the time, the Assumptionist Congregation was developing slowly. Postulants presented themselves. They came in one door and left by another. Fr. d'Alzon was very upset when he considered the candidates recommended to him by other priests. "You see," said Father, "their recommendations come from their heart, not their brain. Don't they know that the heart is a magnifying glass which enlarges qualities? Charitably they want to be of service, but it is charity poorly understood. A canon sent me a young man who fell into an epileptic fit the second time he came to choir. A country pastor sent me a one-eyed fellow. Soon, no doubt, some cripple will come along. Recently I just received a young Jewish convert sent by a venerable priest who declares he has found in this Jew a true religious vocation. But he didn't say for what Order."

It is this young Jew that I want to speak about, along with Fr. Pernet. One evening, this Jewish postulant, Fr. Pernet, and I were seated on a

stone bench in the school yard. From the conversation, it soon became evident that Fr. Pernet was tactfully trying to penetrate into the soul of this young man. The Jew was so enthusiastic that it boded no good. He spoke loudly, gesticulated a lot, like some oracle on her tripod. "Yes," he cried out, "I want to give myself to God. I want to go out and preach the New Law to the idolaters. I want to shed my blood..."

"Not so fast, my friend," said Fr. Pernet. "Before any of that, if you want to be a religious, a good religious, you'll have to peel potatoes in the kitchen, wash the dishes, and sweep the corridors. You want to preach the New Law. Do you know it sufficiently to teach it to others? You'll have to study."

"What!" said the son of Israel, "Don't I know that Christ has come and isn't it enough to announce his coming?" Here the fanatic placed both hands on his head and said, "Don't you see the blood of Christ poured out upon my head?"

"My friend," said Fr. Pernet very calmly, "all I see is that you're starting to get bald. Besides, you have been baptized. The blood of mercy has washed away all the blood of malediction. Let's leave aside all declamation. Allow me to say to you that Jesus Christ summarized in a few words the spirit that his disciples must have. He said, 'Be as prudent as serpents and as simple as doves.' For a religious, prudence means obedience; and simplicity means common sense, ordinary, everyday common sense. Don't declaim. Speak simple prose: simple, unadorned, and especially, calm."

It was discovered that the Israelite had no religious vocation. The conversation was long. I couldn't help admiring this Etienne Pernet, whom I had seen arriving at the College in 1847. Then he had been timid, affable, and sympathetic; but nothing led us to suspect the treasures hidden beneath the timidity and kindness: energy, penetration, clear vision, sound judgment, and strength in time of trial.

It was during the conversation with the Jew that Fr. Pernet revealed many great qualities which until then had been unknown to me, although I already had a high opinion of his virtues.

Who could have foreseen then the future founder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption? During many talks with this dear old friend, I understood the truth of something Fr. d'Alzon had said. "No saint

completely resembles another, yet all resemble Jesus Christ. Here is an apostle.

Is there anyone so unknown and unkempt? Yet when he opens his mouth, we sense that the word of God issues from his lips." I had many intimate talks with Fr. Pernet, and each time I felt that the word of God was issuing from his lips.

PANEGYRIC OF FATHER EMMANUEL D'ALZON

Delivered November 22,1892, by Canon Galeran, in the chapel of Notre-Dame de France, in Jerusalem.

"Remember your leaders who preached the word of God to you, and as you reflect on the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7).

Thus wrote St. Paul to the Hebrews. The words seem very appropriate to the ceremony which gathers us, as we celebrate the twelfth anniversary of our leader whose lips so often preached to us God's word, and whose great spirit of faith, by his example during a lifetime and by the ultimate lesson of his holy death, can prompt us to follow courageously in his footsteps.

Emmanuel d'Alzon! A great name! What memories fill our soul when the name is mentioned! Twelve years ago he departed this earth, but he did not leave us orphans, especially not you, dearly beloved Fathers and Brothers, of whom he said shortly before his death, "You know that after God and the Blessed Virgin, I have loved you more than anything on earth." Is he not still alive among you: as your leader, by the rules which he bequeathed to you; as your guide, by the wise advice transmitted to you; as your Father, by the valiant spirit you have inherited and which must be, by the grace of God, the animating force of your religious life?

At this moment, everything indicates that we attend a memorial service: chants, words of the liturgy, the pall in mid-sanctuary, the ministers' vestments. But even if the exterior is mournful, do we not feel a life-giving breeze refreshing our souls and dissipating all sadness?

The tomb, on the edge of which we stand, was barely closed by the hands of men when it seemed to re-open, by some mysterious force. The

deceased seemed to speak still. Everything was finished, we were told, yet everything continued with new and unexpected vigor. From the grave itself seemed to flow a fertile stream which, during twelve years, has covered the earth, multiplying itself into various channels which are the Congregations of Assumptionist religious and nuns.

Your life span dates only from yesterday, dear Fathers and Brothers. You are barely formed, yet you fill everything and your action is felt far and wide. Fr. d'Alzon had foreseen this strange phenomenon. "After my death, the works will develop." The early witnesses of this prodigy could tell you of an event, the telling of which does not seem amiss here.

Many years ago, on a feast day, an eminent man who was Father's great friend, a man who was the father of your Superior (Mr. Germer-Durand) read to Fr. d'Alzon a poem that he had improvised to encourage him to persevere in an undertaking which, it was said, would be unsuccessful. I can remember only two stanzas, but they seem to prophesy accurately the unheard-of growth of the Congregation, in personnel and in works.

*L'oeuvre qui naît est comme un fleuve
Encore étroit à son berceau,
Mais qui, dès que le ciel l'abreuve,
Cesse d'être un obscur ruisseau,*

*Et des flanes pierreux des montagnes
fuyant avec rapidité
S'en va porter dans les campagnes
La joie et la fertilité.¹⁵*

¹⁵ A semi-poetic translation:

The work aborning is like a stream
Still narrow at its birth.
As soon as heaven fills it
It ceases as an obscure brook,

And from the rocky mountain slopes
Fleeing with rapidity,

The words speak true. Fr. d'Alzon's successor has more than once noted that the Congregation's work increases, with God's blessings. I cannot forget that I was in Paris and Livry during the last retreat, shortly before the General Chapter. I saw many groups of religious arrive from the four points of the compass, returning from their various battlefields to the Mother House, to rest for a moment from their labors. Astonished, I said to Father General who, like me, remembers the tiny birthplace of this large family, "You need only whistle and immediately all around you are battalions which God has multiplied and spread throughout the peoples. *Sibilabo eis et congregabo illos...et multiplicabo eos...et seminabo eos in populis* (Zc 10:8,9). Here, around the table at Livry are sons as numerous and full of vitality as the shoots from an olive tree. *Filii tui sicut novellae olivarum in circuitu mensae tuae?*" (Ps 127:3).

All this is the work of Fr. d'Alzon, a docile instrument of God's grace. Now let me try to draw the main features of this great man's portrait, as I saw him: a perfect gentleman, a real priest, a holy religious.

I — The perfect gentleman:

Grace transforms nature without absorbing it. The human personality is not destroyed by the supernatural element, any more than Our Lord's humanity was absorbed by his divine nature. The saint, though a transformed person, remains himself. Before studying the life of a saint, it is useful to be cognizant of his inclinations, qualities, and defects in the natural order, to be able to see grace at work, transforming a subject who doesn't resist its influence but submits willingly to it.

Emmanuel Joseph Marie Maurice d'Alzon was remarkable because of his noble exterior, distinguished manners, and chivalrous spirit. At eighteen he was a handsome, amiable, sprightly lad. His conversations were lively, tasteful, unostentatious, and they captivated everyone. He always seemed at ease and dignified, as befitted the son of a great nobleman.

Carries throughout the countryside
Joy and fertility.

Later, when we had him as a teacher, we admired his height, his powerful chest, his fine head held high, his penetrating gaze, and his expressive mouth. We loved him passionately because he fascinated us. History relates that those around St. Basil tried to imitate his bearing. I have in mind more than one teacher or student who, probably unconsciously, tried to resemble this man, in whom we refused to see any imperfection.

Who among the alumni does not remember the ease and gracefulness with which he assisted Bp. Cart at the altar? More than once I saw him among a group of bishops, for instance at the consecration of St. Paul's church in Nîmes, and I said (forgive my frankness), "He eclipses them all."

His charm was embellished by his chivalrous spirit. Never, even in the slightest matters, can we find Fr. d'Alzon acting under-handedly. Never did he act in a petty or narrow way. Sometimes I saw this priest of angelic purity blush when he had to treat of delicate matters, but he never had to be ashamed of any fault against honesty, magnanimity, generosity, or even decorum. Emmanuel d'Alzon always acted honorably, and this, when supernaturalized, leads men far indeed.

He taught us to have toward Jesus Christ the fidelity and loyalty of subjects toward their King. In one of his Saturday evening lectures, he told us, "It's not a question of whether sin is ignoble or whether it's charming. A specific action may be sinful because it is forbidden. The same action may be good in itself, when it is lawful in certain states of life. For you the question should be this: this temptation fascinates me. After all, I don't see that it's very evil. But my King forbids me to do this. Honor requires that I obey his commands without discussion."

Examine the life of many of his former students and you will recognize them by this sign: they have been faithful to God, to the Church, to Country, and to Honor. Not a single man formed by Fr. d'Alzon's hands has failed to become a true and proud gentleman, in the full sense of the term, whether he was from aristocratic stock or not.

Emmanuel, only son of an illustrious family, heir to a great name and an immense fortune, accustomed to being waited upon, was by nature inclined to be haughty, lordly, sometimes even disdainful, brusque, and biting in speech. By virtue, he became simple and meek. When he was

Vicar-General, he once insisted on carrying himself, from the railroad station to the College, the heavy suitcase of Fr. Corail, a Jesuit. He refused our offers of help.

He feared his mother, trembled before her. One day, having spent his last cent and needing a rather substantial amount of money, he decided to ask his mother for it. On the way, he met some close friends to whom he said, "I'm afraid. I have to ask my mother for money and I know that she will rebuke me." As he returned, he saw the same friends and he was jubilant. "Would you believe it? My mother didn't scold me and she gave me everything that I asked for."

While he was in Rome, young Emmanuel often wrote to Fr. Vernières who was then pastor in Monferrier, near Montpellier. I have been privileged to read much of this correspondence, where every line reveals a Christian gentleman. He mentions the document he was required to sign at the request of Pope Gregory XVI, condemning the errors of La Mennais. He announces his ordination and seeks advice about his future. After his ordination, he considered becoming a missionary, but felt that his ministry should be in Paris, among the youths who were studying. But he writes that Cardinal Micara wisely advised him to follow the usual path and place himself in the hands of his bishop. That's what he decided to do.

Later, when Fr. Vernières founded a retreat house for priests in trouble, Fr. d'Alzon encouraged him and generously helped him financially. From Fr. Vernières I have something which I must mention. It is an intimate detail but it brings out his gentlemanly character and his purity of heart.

When Emmanuel returned after his first studies in Paris, he was a splendid young nobleman. Aristocratic neighbors of Lavagnac often visited the d'Alzons and brought along their daughters. These well-bred young ladies, whose piety and virtue enhanced their beauty and grace, liked young d'Alzon's company. That was only natural. Some fell in love with him. Fr. Vernières said that as soon as Emmanuel realized this he showed his fine character. Tactfully and delicately, without changing his ways in the least, without giving the young ladies the least encouragement, without offending their innocent and simple hearts, he kept them at a certain distance. Smoothly yet strongly, he put an end to

any budding love affair and thus won esteem and respect. He was a perfect gentleman.

II — The real priest:

What is a real priest? He unites the spirit of his vocation to his sacred character. He offers the Holy Sacrifice, but he also communicates to others the treasure he has received: the Sacraments, God's word, divine knowledge, adding to these his example and, if need be, his own immolation. In short, the real priest is preacher, director, and doctor.

In the pulpit Fr. d'Alzon was wonderful to behold. His gestures were ample and graceful. Usually he didn't look directly at his audience, unless he got carried away or was apostrophizing them. The intonation of his voice was not always on pitch. He claimed that his voice might be off, but that his ear was exact. In this he was mistaken.

His eloquence often became sublime. At the outset he was calm and simple; then, bit by bit, he rose higher and higher on what Bp. Besson aptly termed "vigorous wing beats." He didn't write out his sermons. He prayed, meditated, and mortified himself. He used to say, "Study gathers material and organizes it, but before preaching it is better to leave books aside except to check the accuracy of quotations. Prayer alone gives grace and the power of penetration. The sermon that counts is not always the one that is literally correct but the one that has been prepared before the Blessed Sacrament and by penance, meditation, and prayer."

Lacordaire one day said to Father, "You preach too much. You become exhausted." To which Father replied, "A vast torrent, in an instant, can carry everything before it, but the tiny drop needs to fall constantly if it wants to make an impression. I am only the tiny drop." But often he was the torrent. Nîmes will never forget the conferences he gave in the church of St. Charles in 1848, after the revolution which he had witnessed in Paris. Hours before the talk, the church was literally invaded. Men perched on the balcony balustrade while others climbed on benches behind the high altar and stuck their heads through the candlesticks.

His Saturday evening instructions at Assumption and his Sunday explanations of the epistles of St. Paul remain in the memories of alumni. Some who later became priests found in them a rich source of sermon material. His Lenten series in Nîmes and elsewhere were very

successful. The clergy of Montauban remember his witty, refined, and pertinent retreats and conferences.

His former students cannot forget his impromptu exhortations, born in moments of sublime inspiration, such as his Christmas midnight mass improvisation on the Real Presence, at communion time. His resplendent face, his look, the tenor of his words were supernatural, ecstatic.

I must also mention his words to Bp. Cart on a First Communion day. When the Bishop, with mitre and crosier, arrived at the chapel entrance, Fr. d'Alzon said to him: "Excellency, you are the only one for whom I would deprive myself of the happiness of distributing Holy Communion to my children. I asked you to preside the ceremony. I thank you for accepting, and I say to you that my sacrifice is transformed into joy because it is for Your Excellency that I deprive myself of this consolation." Bowing toward his Vicar-General, the bishop answered very graciously, "Dear Father d'Alzon, I need only consult my heart to understand your sacrifice and appreciate the generosity of your action in inviting me to give First Holy Communion to your children. Still, it all stays within the family. Often, on a father's feast day, he foregoes his rights and, taking his children by the hand, he goes to the grandfather to ask for his children a caress and a blessing. You are the father and I am the grandfather here. It is in your name and at your request that I come to distribute the graces and the favors that you could have lavished yourself. The dear children will see us together at the altar. They know that both our hearts really form only one. What one gives, the other will help give." God knows it also, and these memories of forty years ago are still fresh in our minds.

The real priest is also a director of souls. Experience proves that an excellent director for men, soldiers, and sailors may not prove to be a good director for women, young girls, and nuns. But Fr. d'Alzon was both. His direction was rather special: it was somewhat forthright, yet delicate. He was original yet practical. His decisions were sure and well motivated. Very knowledgeable in spirituality and the writings of the great mystics, he was eagerly sought by souls whom God called to great perfection. Men, women, and children liked to have him as their confessor.

At Assumption, where many of the teachers were priests and where

the students were completely free to choose, most chose Fr. d'Alzon as confessor. He was really both father and judge and his influence upon souls was prodigious. This man, so quick, so cutting, so masculine in manner, was gifted with a mildness that penetrated forcefully into souls, permeating them with fine perfume. Some day we will discover to what heights of perfection he directed Huet, the coachman he was happy to call his friend. Huet's acts of charity, abnegation and penance would give lustre to the life of a canonized saint.

Father did not neglect study. He studied all the time, especially the Fathers of the Church. He was a canonist and stayed abreast of the work of all the Roman congregations. Modern questions deeply interested him. No other man so well understood his times and his contemporaries in all walks of life. He read many English authors and judged them accurately. He prized his Elzévir collection of classical authors and relaxed by reading Cicero, Seneca the Elder, Sallust, and the poets.

I never heard anything comparable to the course on Church history that he taught the seniors. His outlook was broad and his judgments sure. His exposition was clear, his chronology was orderly, his quotations were exact and varied. Everything denoted a scholar and a perfect professor. Like Bossuet, he had wonderful panoramic views, but he could go into great detail. He interested his audience so much that the end of the class always seemed to come too soon.

III — The holy religious:

Let us now consider the religious. Fr. d'Alzon was a man of rule, of mortification, and of interior spirit.

I should really remain silent here and allow his sons who knew him intimately in religious life to speak. Only they can speak of the interior action that perfected the soul of our Father. I shall mention the little bit that I know, which fits very well into my subject.

Fr. d'Alzon's punctuality was proverbial. He disliked waiting and hated to cause someone else to wait. He strode through the city streets watch in hand in order not to be late.

He marveled at the Church's constitution. One day, during a walk, he said to me, "The Church is a combination of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. In a religious congregation, it's a good thing to have an

aristocracy which renews itself with the help of a democracy. It is the only way to maintain traditions, to set a tone by stimulating emulation which does not harm humility. The rule must be the same for everyone. We must never accept situations which grant privileges, dispensations, or permanent diminutions which would be motivated not by health or other reasons and which would be granted to reward work or success, which God alone will one day reward.”

As we all know, his mortifications were extreme. He could have been satisfied with the chronic pains of stomach cramps. Nevertheless, he slept on a straw mattress hard as a rock, in a white-washed room. He took bloody disciplines and used a hair shirt which the Carmelites had woven for him at his request. I have seen this shirt covered with blood. He used iron chains with pointed hooks. One day, to my surprise, he sent me one of these chains, rolled up in a fine box, as a New Year’s present in 1849.

Others could mention his barefoot pilgrimages to Notre-Dame de Rochefort or his frequent retreats at the Chartreuse of Valbonne. What others probably don’t know is that once as we climbed the hill at Rochefort he told me his feet were bleeding. He arrived at the sanctuary and said Mass, but as he left the altar he almost fainted. The fine Superior of the Marists, Fr. Séon, guessed the cause of his suffering and with great difficulty convinced him to accept a pair of cloth slippers. When he took off his shoes, his feet looked as if they had been soaked in blood.

Let me recount another fact, because facts, even when familiar, speak more loudly than even the most eloquent words. Under Fr. d’Alzon’s direction, a group of teachers left Nîmes for Rochefort. I was the only student who went along. When we arrived at the Lafoux inn after a long hike, we discovered that there were not enough beds for everybody. Eventually things got organized and Fr. d’Alzon said he would share his room with me. When we got to the room, we discovered that it had only one bed.

“Wait a minute,” said Fr. d’Alzon, “leave everything to me.” He dragged the bedside carpet across the room, threw upon it a pillow from an old chair and covered it with a blanket. I watched silently, thinking that this was going to be my bed. Father then said, “You are going to

sleep in the bed. I'll sleep there. Hurry up! Good night."

"Never, Father. I'll not agree to such an arrangement."

"Take it or leave it. I'm not going to change. If you're not satisfied, I'll open the door and you can go sleep in the corridor. That's it! Is that clear?"

I had to give in. He lay down on the floor, despite the fatigue of a long walk.

His spirit of prayer was marvelous. In a father-to-son conversation, he told me that he found it very easy to isolate himself and to be able to pray or meditate even in the midst of a crowd, despite the noise. How often I saw him rapt in prayer after Holy Mass or when he stopped in Montpellier to pray in the chapel where I was chaplain. On such occasions, I served as altar boy. He liked that, he said, because it let him be at ease when speaking to the Lord.

He saw God everywhere. Only the desire to do God's will influenced him. It was his only motivation and from it he drew his great detachment. He said to Cardinal Mermillod who, when young, had wanted to enter the Assumptionists, "No. Stay where you are. You'll do more good there. Anyhow, some day you'll be bishop of Geneva."

Once he was coming out of the cathedral of Nîmes and a beggar was asking alms. Father had no money in his pockets. He returned to the sacristy, removed his fine linen shirt, and gave it to the poor man. This was not unique; such actions were countless in his life.

I dare say that if the Pope had requested of him, "Give up your Congregation. Change your plans, modify your ideas," he would not have hesitated an instant before complying. And I am absolutely convinced that today the Assumptionists would abandon all their prosperous undertakings, projects, and works if the Pope asked them. Such is the Assumption spirit: serve God and the Church, as God and the Church want to be served, not otherwise.

In sanctifying himself, Fr. d'Alzon entered upon the way of the great saints. We find in the lives of these great people a triple characteristic: a time of trial, a time of unpopularity, a time of triumph.

1 - Emmanuel very early knew opposition. Not many hearts were more tortured than his. He had to struggle with his father and mother,

whom he loved tenderly, so tenderly that for a moment he seemed to weaken. But Heaven's call is more powerful than any opposition, and he was victorious. We know about his departure for Montpellier, then for Rome. His mother wrote to Fr. Vernières, "Ah! You don't know what it is to lose this dear child. Emptiness and night surround us since his departure."

Again in Rome he faced trials: a jealousy at first, followed by mistrust because of his close ties to La Mennais. When he returned as a priest, bishops fought to get him. He decided upon Nîmes, where Bishop Chaffoy named him Vicar-General despite loud protests from some members of the clergy.

His family lived in the diocese of Montpellier. From the Ordinary, Bp. Thibault, he requested faculties to hear confessions. But Bp. Thibault was prejudiced against Fr. d'Alzon and refused the faculties. I'll always remember Fr. d'Alzon's sadness when I visited him after his mother's death. With tears in his eyes he said to me, "My son, my mother died in my arms and I didn't have the consolation of giving her a final absolution. My old friend, Fr. Berthomieu was there. I didn't have the faculties."

2- Struggles continued during the second period, the time of unpopularity. It was said of Fr. d'Alzon, "He's an original, eccentric, spendthrift, extravagant." Enemies made these remarks and more than one friend repeated them, but without the same harshness. Others said, "What a pity! He looked so wonderful in his cassock, rabat, and cincture. Why did he ever decide to put on that horrible cowl? What a fine bishop he would have made." Fr. d'Alzon heard and knew all this, but he sailed ahead under full sail, as he had planned.

Influenced briefly by troublemakers, Bp. Plantier said to him somewhat harshly after the death of Viscount d'Alzon, "I suppose that now that your father is deceased you will no longer remain Vicar-General?" Let me hasten to add that the bishop soon realized that he had spoken unfairly. Until his death he remained a faithful friend of Father, who had done him a good turn by persuading him to abandon Gallicanism.

One day in Rome, while he was alone with Pius IX, Father saw a photograph of Bp. Pie of Poitiers on the Pope's desk. Fr. d'Alzon had a

picture of Bp. Plantier in his breviary and he asked the Pope to accept it and put it next to Bp. Pie's picture. Smiling, Pius IX said, "But he's a Gallican." "True," said Father, "but it will do him a lot of good to be in such company, under your watchful eye." The Pope accepted.

We must state, as a simple fact and without judging anyone's motives, that after Bp. Plantier's death Father was bypassed by the Chapter, which elected as Vicar Capitular precisely those men who did not share the ideas of the former Vicar-General .

Another painful situation needs mentioning. When a society is in the process of coming into existence, it is not surprising to find candidates coming and going. Fr. d'Alzon would have wanted as candidates two students, very different from each other. He was disappointed: one became a bishop and the other one never amounted to very much, although God's grace kept him in line and he tried to do a bit of good. These two students were the first to hear about Father's projects. Now the hand of God intervenes. Father made his choice, but God made a better one. Without knowing very well why, these two lads pushed toward Fr. d'Alzon God's choice, whose name was François Picard. Neither the famous bishop nor the other fellow, with whatever gifts they might have had, were made for the position in the Congregation which Fr. Picard now holds, with such wisdom and energy. When God, whose ways are admirable, wants to perpetuate a work, he raises up to succeed one man another man who completes the first. Fr. d'Alzon and Fr. Picard complement each other perfectly. The first was full of daring, fire, and impetuosity, going rapidly from one thing to another, creating and then going beyond. He set things in motion and led things off. After him, the helm passed to a strong hand governed by a spirit that was calm, positive, and skilled in administration. In both men we can find the same spirit of faith, of zeal, and of love for the Church. The first spread his fire exteriorly by splendid and majestic eruptions. The second knows how to contain his boiling spirit. He does not lead aimlessly, but like a good navigator he scans the skies, has his eye fixed on the compass, and keeps his ship carefully on the course that has been set.

It was said, wrongly, that Fr. d'Alzon was so superior that he would be irreplaceable. "When he dies, everything will crumble." Of Fr. Picard's leadership, it is said, "Everything the Assumptionists undertake

succeeds.” Fr. d’Alzon was faulted for spending lavishly. Undoubtedly economy is praiseworthy. True, Fr. d’Alzon plunged ahead without reckoning, but it was not for himself that he ruined himself financially more than once. It was for others. Dr. Combal told him one day, “If you keep it up, you’ll ruin your health as you ruined your capital.” To which Fr. d’Alzon answered, “I’ve already ruined that more than once.”

The Gospel has a wonderful saying of Jesus, “The children of this world are wiser... than the children of light.” Undoubtedly the Lord meant to say that the children should have prudence just as worldly people do. Nonetheless, it is also true that although the children of light are often characterized by a lack of such prudence, the lack has not prevented them from being true children of light.

Let us pass over some of the trials that beset Father during the last years of his life, trials coming from men and women to whom he was devoted and in whom he had great confidence. His moral sufferings were never lacking. In body and soul he had become a living sacrifice.

3 - Triumph! Father never experienced it. He predicted, “After my death the works will develop.” Through the thick darkness he could detect the first glimmers of victory. His death was itself a triumph. When Augustine was dying in Hippo, the Vandals stopped besieging the city until he had breathed his last. Modern Vandals had to postpone their expulsions in order to allow the famous disciple of Augustine to die in peace.

His death-room at Assumption has become a sort of sanctuary. Let us enter it in thought, to hear with respect his final words, which are sacred to us, “I want only God’s will...I desire only Heaven... My dear Brothers, you know that after God and the Blessed Virgin I have loved you more than anything on earth...We are about to part...submission to God’s will. He is Master...There are many good religious who are not here. My heart goes out to them...I should kneel before you to beg forgiveness...I shall help you all I can...Be good religious.”

He died and his triumph began immediately. His funeral was splendid, not because of the pomp, but because of the crowds attending. Bishop Besson sent his clergy a pastoral letter, a veritable panegyric, an unsurpassable masterpiece of eloquence, interest, and noble sentiments.

Bp. de la Bouillerie wrote, “He was a great Catholic, a great religious

and one of the men of our century who brought the most honor to the Church. To his Congregation he left a tradition of solid virtue, of noble spirit, of firm, unshakeable resistance to the compromises of the age, of unlimited dedication to the Apostolic See.”

Bp. Vitte said, “He was a valiant soldier, a strong man among the men of Israel. His soul charmed mine.”

Bp. Mermillod, “The Church loses a valiant and faithful servant.”

The bishop of Rodez, “He was called imprudent, carried away, capable of losing everything, yet he’s the one who won everything.”

The bishop of Anthédon called Fr. d’Alzon, “An eminent priest, very gifted, very generous, very brave, obsessed by God’s glory, jealous of God’s rights, and zealous for his Kingdom.”

Bp. Besson applied to him the phrase of Bossuet, “Even the shadow of Fr. d’Alzon can still win battles.”

Pius IX used to say of him, “D’Alzon, he’s our friend.”

What more can you want than these testimonials from the Papacy and the hierarchy? It is the Church which speaks thus, to tell us of the great worth of our Father. Is not this a triumph?

Look around you! Consider the splendid progress of this Congregation which at its outset was so tiny and weak. What fine enterprises radiate from the tomb at Nîmes where our Father now rests. My brothers, your success is due first of all to God’s grace, and then to what I might call your clear and fixed policy. You know what you want, where you want to go, and you advance confidently. The world knows your objectives, it sees them clearly because you don’t hide them. And everyone is amazed.

The program you follow with perseverance is found in a brief note in your Founder’s handwriting, written in 1877 and repeated exactly on June 1, 1879, addressed to his successor: “I call to mind the Assumptionist motto, ‘Thy Kingdom Come,’ and to stay faithful to it, I propose to myself three main means:

- 1) To work for the restoration of Christian education on the principles of St. Augustine and of St. Thomas ...
- 2) To fight the enemies of the Church, enlisted in secret societies under the flag of the Revolution ...

To strive for the unity of the Church, devoting myself to the destruction of Schism. For me, that is everything.”

For you, Fathers and Brothers, that is everything. If you consider carefully the progress of your Congregation you will see that it follows the Founder’s marching orders. Your program of studies follows his outline and coincides with that of Leo XIII. You neglect no branch of the sacred sciences, nor their adjunct sciences. And you are remarkably successful. Against secret societies and sects hostile to Church and Society, you have used the powerful arm of the press, wielded by skillful men. God has blessed this work beyond all expectation. Against the spirit of schism, you have begun great works such as pilgrimages to Lourdes, Rome, and Jerusalem. They awaken Catholic enthusiasm and force people to realize the greatness and majesty of the Roman Church. In a word, your projects have become events and people have admired them. Crowds follow you, despite predictions that you would fail. You are heirs of a rich inheritance. Remain faithful to your Father.

In closing, I would like to apply to Fr. d’Alzon these words from the first book of Kings, “I shall raise up for myself a faithful priest who will act according to my heart and my thought. I shall build for him a faithful house and he shall walk before the face of my Anointed, all the days of his life.

This is the real portrait of Emmanuel d’Alzon: a priest raised up by God, who sought God’s will in everything. For him God has built a house, a family, of which you are the chosen ones. May he obtain for his children, who love and revere him on earth, the grace to march on, like him, without faltering, in the sight of Jesus, the only Master and Lord, who will be our eternal Reward. Amen.